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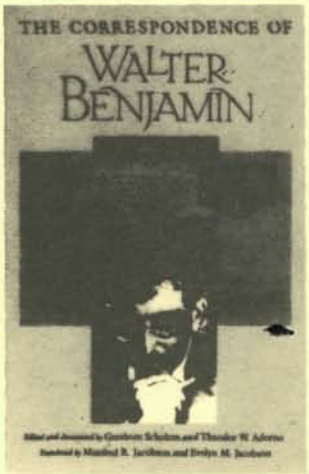

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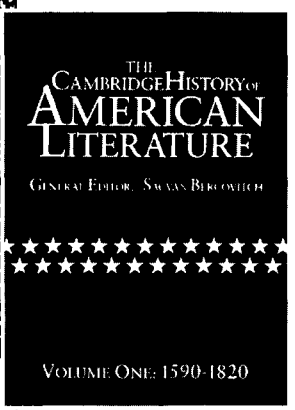

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Here to Buy Mink

ARISTIDES

Oedipus, schmoedipus, just so long as a boy loves his mother.

—Old joke

A few months ago my mother's youngest sister, my Aunt Florence, died, which put paid to an entire branch of my ancestry, a full generation on the maternal side. My mother's was a family of four sisters and one brother: in order of birth they were Ceil, Samuel, Belle (my mother), Sally, and Florence. All are now dead. Every family has its secrets, and many of my mother's family's secrets, which must have been manifold, died with this uncle and these aunts. I have been able to unearth only a few.

Here is one: There was no great abundance of money when my mother was growing up on the West Side of Chicago, yet the family had an English maid, a Cockney with the charming name of Minnie Tumbletee. Minnie sent me a dollar for my birthday every year until I was thirty, after which she must have concluded that I could make it on my own. Minnie was later married to a sergeant who was retired from the British army, a man whose air of cordiality was only topped by the complete incomprehensibility of his speech. But the puzzle to me was how my grandmother, who just managed to make do, happened to have an English maid right through the Depression.

It was sheer pretension, I thought, and it wasn't until I was past forty that I put the question to my mother. "What that was about," said my mother, in her matter-of-fact way, "was that my mother's sister in England had married a successful cap manufacturer in Leeds, whom she one day caught with his mistress. If he wanted to remain married to her and also keep his mistress, which he evidently did, my aunt set out a number of penalties for him. One of these was that he was ever after to send a certain sum of money each month to her sister in Chicago. My mother used this money to pay Minnie's wages."

I never knew my grandmother, who died when I was not yet three. She was an Eastern European Jew whose family at some point had settled in England. Consequently, she spoke with an English accent and her first two children were born in England. My mother, born in Chicago, was the first of her three daughters born in America. I have a photograph of my grandmother standing next to my mother, who is holding me, not yet a year old and got up in a bulky crocheted sweater and an ambitious hairdo featuring a large curl running down the center of my head. The pure type of the matriarch, my grandmother in this photograph is a stout woman with her white hair pulled back in a bun. She is wearing a print dress and holding a purse in a small but thick-fingered hand. Her nose is unmistakably Abrahamic (my mother's maiden name was, in fact, Abrams), and her mouth looks capable of witty but also, should the need arise, of fierce utterance. As I was only to discover after I turned fifty, it is also a face that must have camouflaged much suffering. "You was the apple of your grandmother's eye," Minnie Tumbletee told me any number of times, "for she loved you above all the grandkids." My mother's mother died before I came to know her, which I consider a genuine personal deprivation and a great sadness.

I never knew my mother's father either, and I often asked her about him, but never with satisfying results. My mother and I spoke with reasonable candor about many subjects, but

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her father was not one of them. Such information as she bestowed about him was sketchy at best. He was a nice man, she told me. He was not an outgoing man, she said. As for what he did, it was something in the clothing line, in the needle trades. Plainly, he was not hugely successful. How old he was when he died or what he died of were never revealed.

My mother died of cancer, of liver cancer specifically, and hers turned out to be a prolonged—over more than three years—and sad if not particularly painful death. One evening, during one of her several stays in the hospital, I dined in a dark Chinese restaurant with my father, and I asked him what he knew about my mother's father. I knew my maternal grandfather had died before my father met my mother, but I wondered what he had heard about him. "He killed himself," said my father, looking up from his egg roll. He named the source of his information, then added, "But your mother doesn't know that I know."

My mother and father were best friends, they lived together for fifty-seven years, and yet they never discussed the absolutely crucial fact that my mother's father had been a suicide. My father chose not to discuss it with my mother because he knew it would bring her pain; my mother, I assume, chose not to discuss it in part because it would indeed have been painful, in part because it might have been a source of shame, and in part because my mother was a strong enough woman never to have to convey her grief to anyone, not even to her dearest friend, her husband.

I am certain my mother did not share her grief with her brother or three sisters. These were five people as nearly unlike one another as any group of five persons could be. My mother's older sister, who died in her forties and whom I never knew well, is said to have been extremely savvy. She was lean, looked severe, and married a man whom she so dominated that it wasn't until he was in his seventies that I first noted that he had a slight foreign accent.

My mother's brother, Sam, was a professional gambler, who, against all received wisdom on the subject, died very rich. It is said that, as a young man, he had to go on the lam because he owed Chicago mobsters some very long green. He lived extremely well in Los Angeles, owned a small percentage of the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas, and, by my mother's careful count, at his death had no fewer than twenty-seven Ultrasuede jackets hanging in his closet. Sinatra, it is said, was at his granddaughter's wedding.

My mother's younger sister, my Aunt Sally, for reasons I shall never know, turned herself into a woman of the working class. She married a gentle, handsome man named Sidney, who had a thick black mustache, a serious stutter, and a drinking problem. A woman with huge reserves of affection, she never had children to expend it upon. She became the slightly mad aunt who seems to be a standard fixture at every Jewish wedding, usually found dancing the hora as if it were the closing moments of a stress test.

My mother's youngest sister Florence, the aunt I loved, one day in her early thirties began crying and was unable to stop, with the result that throughout her days she was in and out of insane asylums, psychiatric wards, clinics, and other institutions. She was subjected to electroshock therapy, on and off every pill regimen, up and down every therapeutic rollercoaster, but no one was ever able to relieve her sadness for very long. She died in her sleep at home, one of the few good breaks life afforded her, along with that of having a tenderhearted and faithful husband, who heroically looked after her through her many dark days.

Given all this madness and sadness, I have to report that my mother was one of the least neurotic people I have ever known. The very notion of the neurotic was alien to her. The only time I ever saw her thrown by life was when she was sick with cancer, whose cause she simply couldn't grasp—as, of course, neither could science—but whose effect left her feeling she had been poleaxed. "Did you ever imagine this would happen to me?" she asked me time and again. The way she phrased the question suggested that she looked upon her illness as a judgment, and I could never convince her that there is something arbitrary in the way most kinds of cancer strike and that her character or the way she had lived had nothing to do with her having cancer. Maybe it was this arbitrariness that threw her, for, though the word wasn't one she regularly used, my mother was deeply rational.

My final memories of my mother, of course, are those of her unequal fight—when is it ever

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equal?—against cancer. Her long course of chemotherapy, with its alternating rounds of hope and defeat, was psychologically hard on her. She was never, I believe, in great pain, but she was greatly weakened. So much so that one night during her illness I had to be phoned to help her out of the bathtub. I arrived to find her sitting in the dry tub, wearing a housecoat, looking both puzzled and slightly embarrassed. I remember, toward the end, driving her and my father to her chemotherapy sessions, which she always dreaded. My mother, seated in the front seat next to me, emitted short, panting breaths, which made me think of a wounded animal.

Cancer takes over one's life even more than does a demanding career. Physically and emotionally, there simply isn't time for anything else but the damned disease. So it became for my mother: all-consuming, all-absorbing, leaving her nothing else to think about but the changes in her body and the end that was ever more clearly in sight. Lying on her deathbed, holding my hand, she said, not particularly with relief, but coolly appraising her situation, "I won't be here much longer."

My mother will soon be dead three years, yet in all but fact cancer took my mother away three years before her actual death. After the awfulness of her last years, it is important to me to recapture the woman I remember.

A friend of mine, a woman, once said that my mother looked like a Spanish princess, and there was something to it. She was dark, handsome, stately, regal. She was not very tall, but she never seemed small. Another friend, who shopped at a fish market where my mother sometimes shopped, once asked the Italian owner if he knew my mother. "Oh, yes," he said, "she's a real lady." And she was.

Once, shopping at an outdoor fruit-and-vegetable stand, I watched a young Greek, from behind the counter, work up a fine rhythm goading his mostly female customers into quickly giving him their orders: "Okay. What next? What next? Let's go!" Then a woman of my mother's generation stepped forward and stopped this fellow dead by announcing, "Slow down, you got *me* now," and she proceeded to give him the most meticulous instructions along with her order ("Six bananas, they shouldn't be ripe before Tuesday, when my grandchildren are coming to stay with me"). This little tableau reminded me of my own mother, who was similarly formidable. She was a presence, my mother, a force, not someone to be taken as part of the crowd or masses. Something about her told people to slow down when they responded to her. She had impressive, really quite immense, dignity.

Where this inner strength came from is itself an interesting question. A girl brought up without any extraordinary advantages and some notable disadvantages—being poor, losing a father in an emotionally complicated way, having no real education—my mother became a woman never to be pushed around or otherwise fooled with. Perhaps her inner strength came from her mother, of whom she always spoke with warmth and admiration. Somehow life never frightened my mother. She found it amusing. She could take things as they were, play them as they lay. One of her great gifts to me, I have often thought, was that of confidence. My father reinforced this confidence by scoring a respectable business success. But it was my mother, in never showing the least trace of anxiety or even of nervousness in her dealings with the world, who taught me that there was nothing to be afraid of in life. Her being, her very bearing, suggested that life might even, within obvious limits, be mastered.

My mother had no cultural pretensions. The fact was that she had, in the large C sense of the word, no culture at all. She rarely attended plays or concerts, though sometimes she watched opera singers on PBS. Broadway musicals were the true boundary of her cultural interest, though I'm not sure she cared all that much even for them. She had been to Israel and she had flown to London on the Concorde, but travel really held no interest for her.

The truth is that my mother had very limited curiosity, except about people. This was the other side of her immense practicality. I never saw her read a book until her sickness, which depleted her energy and kept her indoors, and then she read a few of the Isaac Bashevis Singer and I. L. Peretz short-story collections I lent her. She read the newspapers only for local news—chiefly scandals and big crimes, of which Chicago has never had a short supply—and for obituaries. Among the many things she did not bother to read were her son's writings, with the exception of a single story I published that had a setting familiar to her. Near as I can tell, I believe she

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thought I got it right. I fear this makes me sound petulant, irritated that my mother ignored what I wrote. Not true. I never expected her to read what I wrote. I even think she was perfectly correct not to do so. She had better things to do than read about Chamfort, Santayana, and Italo Svevo.

My mother, I suspect, thought her older son a little crazy, though not at all dangerously so, and of course she was right to think this, too. She must have wondered why this son, who seemed smart enough, spent his days reading hopeless books and wrestling with sentences that were intended for a distinctly limited audience, when he could as easily have been a lawyer or a physician and commanded more obvious rewards. Every so often my mother would run into someone who had heard of her son, read something of his, or seen a review of one of his books in a local newspaper, and she would duly report this to me. But it was plain that she herself was not swept away by this. Having changed someone's diapers may tend to make you rather less impressed with him later in life.

Without setting out to do so, my mother served as an excellent ego deflater. I once called to inform her that I had been offered a job teaching English at Northwestern University. "Oh," she said, "that's nice—a job in the neighborhood," as if I had just got a job bagging groceries at a nearby supermarket. (And "a job in the neighborhood," it turns out, is exactly what my teaching at Northwestern has proven to be.) Another time I called to inform her that one of my books won a $5,000 prize from the *Chicago Tribune*. "Oh," she said, "we get that junk from the *Tribune* all the time. We throw it away without reading it." I chose not to explain further.

My mother went to Marshall High School in Chicago, where she took the commercial course and graduated at the age of sixteen. This meant that she learned typing, bookkeeping, shorthand—all the secretarial skills. She worked as a bookkeeper as a young woman until she married my father when she was twenty-four. For the next thirty or so years she had no regular job, but then she went to work in her husband's business in her middle fifties. She was very good at it, which was no real surprise, for my mother was a quick study and extremely competent.

Not infrequently when I telephoned my mother, I heard a noise in the background. Sometimes while talking with me she would be typing a letter; other times she would be chopping vegetables or stirring a soup. She was one of those people who can do two or three things at a time—and do all of them well. Like lots of people with good minds and nothing theoretical or artistic to apply them to, my mother was an excellent cardplayer. She played cards in her thirties and forties—Poker, then later Canasta and a game called Kaluki, but never Bridge, a more suburban game—and she played to win, which she usually did. If she lost, it was never because she did anything stupid. She disliked cardplayers who complained, who, as she would put it, "cried the blues."

Vladimir Nabokov's mother, like mine, I was pleased to read in *Speak, Memory*, also liked poker. "She liked all games of skill and gambling," Nabokov reports. He loved his mother wholly and uncomplicatedly. "She cherished her own past with the same retrospective fervor that I now do her image and my past." John Updike is another writer whose mother seems to have loomed large, though Updike's relationship with his mother was, on the basis of his fictional mothers and from autobiographical references, rather more complex. This was so not least because the senior Mrs. Updike did not altogether approve of Updike's later writing. Perhaps it's better, after all, for a mother not to read her son's writings. Joseph Conrad adored his mother, but he lost her when he was seven—an irreparable loss. Tolstoy, too, was early orphaned. Elizabeth Bishop's mother went into an insane asylum when she, Bishop, was five years old and she never re-emerged. Hemingway had a tyrannical mother, who would really have preferred him to have been a girl. About the Proust kid and his mother, let us not speak.

My own considered view is that it is probably best to have a mother with conventional interests. To have a mother interested in avant-garde art, for example, would be a dreadful drag. Imagine being taken off by such a mother to see a Julian Schnabel exhibit or having to return home early from the playground to go to a John Cage concert. I am pleased as well to have had an entirely apolitical mother. I have a friend, a man of high achievement, whose mother gave his electric train to the Rosenberg children when he was done with it. She later told him, on his way to finishing at

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the top of his Harvard Law School class, that she wished he were rather more like Tom Hayden. My mother simply had no interest in my artistic, intellectual, or political development, for which I am supremely grateful.

My mother felt about politics as Raymond Chandler and his detective Philip Marlowe did; like them, she didn't give a hoot who was president because she knew whoever it was, he would be a politician. "They're all crooks, you know," she once said to me about politicians. My mother viewed professed idealism skeptically, which is of course the proper way to view it. She viewed abstraction in much the same way. She could only be persuaded by the firm, the factual, the particular. She would have been the last person to be susceptible to pyschotherapy. I once told an acquaintance about my mother's having been pyschologically stunned by her cancer. She suggested that there were many "support groups" for people with terminal cancer, and that one of these might be helpful to her. I never for a moment thought of mentioning it to my mother, for I could all too easily imagine her incredulous answer: "You mean you think I will feel better for having told my troubles to strangers? Thank you very much anyway."

None of the issues of the modern day meant a thing to my mother. She took the world, and herself, as they both were. The world wasn't soon likely to be changed; and, besides, it was an endlessly fascinating place as it was. Not to say that the world didn't have its scoundrels, creeps, and con men. Once, when my father was in the hospital for heart surgery, while the doctors—surgeon, cardiologist, radiologist, internist, anesthesiologist—were parading through his room, my mother, drinking a cup of coffee with me in the hospital cafeteria, set her cup down and with a smile announced: "What a pack of thieves and frauds they are!"

My mother had the street-smart knack for spotting phonies. She had a good sense of who liked her and who didn't and the reasons why. She herself displayed no snobbery. One of her best friends in her later life was a woman who had been in Nazi death camps and who had earlier done sewing and alterations for her. When my mother was younger, another of her dearest friends was a tall, freckled, unmarried woman named Marge, who was the aunt of a Quiz Kid of mathematical genius. She was the mistress for decades of a man who was said to be unable to obtain a divorce because his wife was Catholic. Whatever disrespectability might have clung to her friend's liaison was entirely ignored by my mother. When Russian Jews began emigrating to the United States, my mother befriended those she met, many of whom worked for her friends. She had a good instinct, my mother did, for spotting a generous heart.

No doubt she was aided in this by having such a heart herself. My mother never underestimated the usefulness of money—she may, in fact, have overestimated it—but I have never known her to smother a generous impulse. She put herself out for people. She did this for family naturally enough, at one point taking her sister Florence's young son in to live with us for five years, but also for those outside her family. A good part of the social life of middle-class Jewish women of her generation had to do with going to what my mother called "affairs," which weren't affairs in the adulterous sense, but luncheons for one charity or another: the Northwest Home for the Aged, the Home for Jewish Blind, Hadassah, the Cerebral Palsy Foundation. My mother used to sponsor one of these luncheons, which meant picking up the tab for lunch for a hundred and fifty or so women and paying for an entertainer, which usually meant yet another (female) Barbra Streisand imitator. She was always suggesting to my father that he give someone who could use the extra money another hundred dollars for his birthday or Christmas or some other occasion. She knew money could do a lot of things, and helping people out was the best among them.

"I can stand a great deal of gold," Desmond MacCarthy reports that Henry James said on entering a particularly grand drawing room in England. This is perhaps the one sentiment—along with "Never say you know the last word about any human heart"—that my mother shared with Henry James. My mother had an enjoyment of wealth and a distinct taste for glitz. She used the phrase "rich-looking," entirely without irony, in pure approbation. She went to the beauty shop once a week and was a regular at the manicurist. ("For another seven dollars, I can be a lady," she would say.) She boggled at certain modern prices, but never at those for clothes—and she was always handsomely turned out, dressing with flair.

She liked to drive large and impressive cars. Her last was a Cadillac Seville, a maroon job,

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the last of the Caddies with a boxy back. I was in it with her once at O'Hare Airport, when we ran into heavy traffic. I suggested that she put out her arm in the hope that someone would give her a break by letting her into the left-hand lane. "With a car like this," my mother said, casually, "they don't give you a break. They figure you've already had your break."

My mother was of the furs and diamonds generation. One of her last acts of generosity to her own family was to buy her two daughters-in-law mink coats. It was something she wanted to do, a kind of parting gift. Ill with cancer, my mother sat in a large wing chair, while her two daughters-in-law were courted by an amiable furrier who wore what seemed, in the context, a mouton mustache. My wife noted a coat and asked what it was. "That," said the furrier, "is sheared beaver." My mother, hearing this, stiffened and, sitting up in her chair, announced grandly: "We are here to buy mink." A great characteristic statement, I thought at the time, and think even more now.

In telling such anecdotes about my mother I seem in many ways to be describing the stereotype of Jewish women now in their eighties. In some ways, my mother fulfilled that stereotype. She urged people who dined at her table to eat vast quantities of her food. Her taste in decorating was sociologically predictable. Once when I had not called her in four days, she picked up the phone and, hearing my voice, replied, "Hello, stranger." "Mother," I asked, "are we in a Jewish joke here or what?" She laughed.

My mother didn't often tell jokes, but she had a genuine appreciation as well as a subtlety of comprehension for them. She had a lovely comic sense. All my life she reported amusing bits to me. One of the earliest I remember was of a woman with whom she played cards whose two young sons were so rivalrous that she gave up trying to stop their fighting and instead calmly instructed: "Fight nice." My mother once reported meeting a woman who, after her husband's death, claimed his estate was tied up, not in escrow, but in egg roll.

My mother's superior sense of humor was part of her natural feeling for language. She used phrases I had not heard elsewhere, always with considerable adroitness. When someone was lying, she would say that he was "full of hops." Although I never heard her otherwise refer to the Civil War—and I'm not even sure she could have told you when it took place—she sometimes used the simile "like Grant took Richmond"; sometimes, too, people were "fit to be tied." When people protested that she doing way too much for them, my mother would pooh-pooh the matter by saying that "it was nothing and nothing." Too great a tumult she used to call, in what I take was an invention of her own, *roojie boojie.* An infant wandering about, clothes untucked, wearing clumpy diapers, she would invariably call "Orkey Cocker."

"I need that like a loving cup," she would say, making an English play on the Yiddish phrase *loch in kopf,* or hole in the head. My mother spoke little Yiddish around the house, but she had it in command when she needed it. She used it to communicate with Russian Jewish émigrés. Whenever I asked her for a translation of a Yiddish phrase, I was always impressed with the precision of her replies. "A *grauber yung,*" she said, "that would be an unlettered boor." "A *dreykopf,*" I remember her replying to another of my queries, "is a muddle-head." Unlike my mother's, my own Yiddish is good enough to fool the Gentiles but not good enough to speak to real Jews.

All her verbal talents were in her speech. On only a few occasions—when I was in the army and, later, when I lived in New York—do I remember receiving letters from her, and these were disappointing notes of the bread-and-butter variety. She used to open with an awkward sentence that she must have picked up in some business-letter-writing course, which ran: "Hope all is well with you as it leaves us the same." In person, she was always very well spoken. She spoke without grammatical error and never descended to dopey psychobabble or sociodrool: no nurturing, growing, lifestyle, identity-crisis talk passed her lips. In her company you knew you were in the presence of a serious and penetrating person, a woman of parts, whom you would do well not to attempt to con with obscurantist language.

One of my mother's great gifts to me was that she never put me in a position where the need to con her arose. She did this by granting me enormous freedom. Unlike the stereotypical Jewish mother, mine was not in the slightest a nag. I don't recall my mother ever yelling at me, and she never even came close to hit-

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ting me. I have no memory of my mother telling me to sit straight, go study, wear my galoshes, clean my plate, remember my gloves, mind my table manners, come in early, hang up my clothes, get a haircut, or any of the rest of the standard repertoire of mother-to-son communication that most boys undergo from the age of six until, defeated, they finally leave home in their early twenties. My mother must have assumed that I would know these things on my own, or that the world would soon teach them to me. If it was cold and I forgot my gloves, the pain that was the price for my forgetting them was likely to be reminder enough on the next cold day.

My mother asked so little of me. Beyond the age of ten or so, I don't think I asked much of her either, except a fairly high level of those services generally available, at great expense, at a very good hotel: dining at all hours, laundry and maid service, messages. No one is more solipsistic than an adolescent boy, and during these years my mother all but dropped out of existence for me. If I missed her, I also missed the normal Sturm und Drang of the good old parent-adolescent follies. What a waste of time and energy that can be! People who have fought lengthy, serious battles with one or another or both parents seem to come away from these battles worn out and without much energy for anything else later in life. What good luck I had in never having to engage in them!

In *Six Exceptional Women*, James Lord, the biographer of Giacometti, illustrates that the most exceptional woman he has known is not Gertrude Stein or Alice B. Toklas or Marie-Laure de Noailles, but his own mother, to whom he pays a beautiful tribute. Louise Bennett Lord gave her son sympathy and understanding through such crises as life presented and stood by him in every instance, even when she disagreed with him. When she learned that her son was homosexual, at a time when this was not a talk-show subject, she greatly worried about it but did not in the least let it lessen her love for him. When he wished for a career as a writer, she and her husband, largely through her insistence, helped support him in the endeavor through many years when it looked as if this might be an egregious mistake. James Lord's mother was steadfast, reasonable, tolerant, kind, generous, good.

Lord's portrait of his mother, and of his relationship with her, is built from a large collection of letters he and his mother exchanged. They wrote as much as they did because Lord lived in Paris, his mother in New Jersey and Connecticut. What admirable documents their letters make—and enviable ones, too. In them, mother and son not only offered each other encouragement and solace when such qualities were most needed, but they were able to say, straight out and in print, how much they loved each other. After Lord returned to Europe, following a trip to comfort his mother during her husband's last days and to see her through the funeral, she wrote to tell him, "I wouldn't have thought that I could love you more than I already did, but now I do." Those are words that every son would like to hear.

A man assured of his mother's love, Freud somewhere says, is a conqueror. But mother love must be applied in careful proportions. Too much suffocates. A friend of mine jokes that his mother had such an elevated opinion of his talents that she would have liked him to accompany himself on the violin as he read from the Torah at his bar mitzvah. F. Scott Fitzgerald, who found his mother an embarrassment, in later life blamed her for spoiling him. People with a keen eye can sometimes spot men who seem to have had too much mother love: the chief sign is an extraordinarily high opinion of oneself accompanied by a slightly sad puzzlement that the world doesn't seem to share it.

I was always certain of my mother's love, yet in what I now think a usefully qualified way. Ours was not a family whose members went about hugging one another, exclaiming our love. My mother, though always immensely generous to her family, was not a woman who lived for her children. Nor, I hasten to add, would her sons have wished her to do so. She was an independent person, with a life of her own—she wasn't one of those mothers who drove her children to various lessons, insisted that everything she did was for her children, or claimed that being a parent was a full-time job—and she made it fairly plain that she expected us to live in the same independent way.

I think she also expected us to live by her standard. In high school, I went out with a girl who worked, after school, in a neighborhood shop. One day my mother told me she walked into the shop and met this girl. I waited for her pronouncement, which, when it came,

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stung: "You," she said, "can do better than that." Another time, when I was fourteen, my mother asked me if I had any money on me. When I told her I had a dollar or so in change, she replied, "A boy your age should have more money than that on him." Years later, when I was going through a divorce, I was surprised to learn that my mother thought I would move into a hotel, on the Near North Side, that was several notches above what I could afford. Perhaps these were occasions—and quite rare occasions they were—when my mother put herself in my place.

Many years ago, in the *New York Review of Books*, I accused Senator William Benton, the publisher of *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and yet another son of a strong mother, of not being the man his mother was. I have often wondered what kind of man my own mother would have been. Rather a dashing one I think. She probably would have been a businessman and, I have no doubt—given her quickness and orderliness of mind and sound gambling instincts—a successful one: clever, daring, generous, a powerful moneymaker, a wheel, an operator, a very big deal.

My mother was quite without sentimentality or nostalgia. She almost never talked about the old days, good or bad, though I do remember her remarking on men selling sweet corn and sweet potatoes, warm and ready for eating, on the streets of the old West Side of the Chicago of her girlhood. Every year she would buy me a birthday gift, but it was never chosen with much care. Soon she took to buying me six pairs of undershorts one year, six T-shirts the next; and then, when I informed her that I had an overstock, she began buying me an annual dozen handkerchiefs—gifts that I received, it seems worth adding, in the bags they were brought home in, otherwise unwrapped.

I have seen my mother's feelings hurt and thought her at those times especially beautiful—dignified and very impressive in her subdued anger. These painful times were usually occasioned by what she felt was ingratitude on the part of others. Every family has its theme, and ours, for as long as I can remember, has always been ingratitude. Only late in her life did I see my mother cry, and, given her strength of character, I was stunned by it. I was made miserable knowing there was nothing I could do to comfort her.

Rather late in my own life it occurs to me that, in retrospect, I am something of a mama's boy. I don't mean in the sense of having been tied to my mother's apron strings. She wouldn't have appreciated the encumbrance; and, besides, she didn't all that often wear aprons. No, it is more and more in the sense of coming to resemble my mother. I am coming to resemble her, first, physically. I have her high color, thin ankles, fleshy earlobes; the lid of my right eye is beginning to droop as did hers in her middle age. My view of the world, I sometimes think, is not so very different from my mother's either, though I once thought it was radically different.

My mother and I never told each other secrets or spoke of the things that stirred our souls. I shall go to my own grave not knowing essential things about my mother. Did she, for example, believe in God? (I suspect not, but I don't really know.) There were obviously bounds we both felt we could not cross. When I divorced, in my thirties, for example, she never asked me why; she only asked if I was sure it was absolutely necessary. It was understood that I would never in any way criticize my father, her husband, in her presence. From an outsider's view, it might appear that my mother and I were never intimate. In the conventional way, I suppose we weren't. We were instead beyond intimacy. We were at that stage of affection where we understood each other without having to explain much, where we knew we could rely on each other without any qualification, where we loved each other so much that we didn't have to display our love in outward endearments. I miss her, like mad.

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Meanwhile, Back on the Ward . . .

JAY NEUGEBOREN

AT THREE A.M., on a cool, summer night—a few hours after my youngest son has graduated from high school—I find myself cruising the deserted streets of Northampton, Massachusetts, searching for the fifty-year-old man who is my brother. I have considered calling the police, but I know that, if a policeman actually finds my brother and approaches him, Robert might, as in the past, panic and become violent.

My brother Robert has spent most of his life, since the age of nineteen, in mental hospitals and psychiatric wards in and around New York City. The list is long: Hillside, Creedmoor, Elmhurst, Gracie Square, Mid-Hudson, Bellevue, Kings County, Rikers Island, South Beach, and others.

Robert had, until the time of his first breakdown in 1962, been a delightful, popular, and gifted boy and young man—talented at dancing, acting, and singing, invariably winning the lead in school and camp plays and skits. He'd had a love and talent for tennis, writing, and chess (he was in a chess club with Bobby Fischer at Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn, but Fischer refused to play with him; "'With you, Neugeboren, I don't play,' he always said to me," Robert says. Why not? "Because," Robert says, smiling, "I played crazy"). He was a good if erratic student in high school, won a New York State Regents Scholarship to college, and successfully completed his freshman year at CCNY. He was, in short, a bright and idiosyncratic young man with a sense of life and humor all his own, a person who, until his first breakdown, showed no signs (except for those that, looking back, any of us might find in ourselves) that such a breakdown was at all likely, much less inevitable.

Robert's diagnosis has changed frequently in the past thirty years, depending largely upon which drugs have been successful in keeping

✪ JAY NEUGEBOREN is the author of *The Stolen Jew*, *Before My Life Began*, and other novels.

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him calm, stable, or compliant. He was schizophrenic when enormous doses of Thorazine and Stelazine calmed him; he was manic-depressive (bipolar) when lithium worked; he was manic-depressive-with-psychotic-symptoms, or hypomanic, when Tegretol or Depakote (anti-convulsants), or some new anti-psychotic or anti-depressant—Trilafon, Adapin, Mellaril, Haldol—promised to make him cooperative, and he was schizophrenic (again) when various doctors promised cures through insulin coma therapy or megadose vitamin therapy or gas therapy. At the same time, often in an attempt to minimize side effects, other drugs were poured into him: Artane, Benadryl, Cogentin, Kemadrin, Symmetrel, Prolixin, Pamelor, Navane. . . .

During these years, Robert also participated in a long menu of therapies: group therapy, family therapy, multi-group family therapy, Marxist therapy, Gestalt therapy, psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy, goal-oriented therapy, art therapy, milieu therapy, et al. Most often, though—the more chronic his condition, the truer this became—he received no therapy at all. It is as if, I often think, the very history of the ways in which our century has dealt with those it calls mentally ill has, for more than thirty years now, been passing through my brother's mind and body.

Robert and I talk with each other almost every day and see each other often, sometimes in New York, sometimes in Massachusetts, and though our visits are not without their difficulties (why should we be different from other brothers?), visits in my home, with my children, have invariably been without incident.

I've never seen Uncle Robert this way, each of my children said to me, the day before and the day after my son Eli's graduation. Is he going to be all right? Can I help? And then: And what about you, Pop? Are *you* going to be all right?

My son Eli returned home from his all-night (supervised) graduation party at the local county fairgrounds at about 6:00 A.M., and Robert arrived not long after that and ordered me to put him on a bus for New York immediately. He looked ghastly (he had—inexpertly—given himself a haircut and shaved off his mustache) and seemed altogether disoriented: his hands and arms were flapping uncontrollably, his body was hunched over, his eyeglasses were covered with a milk-white sticky substance ("Scum!" he declared, when I asked), his movements were jagged, and he kept turning on me and screaming things that made no obvious sense. Whether I did or did not reply, he became more and more enraged, telling me again and again that I wasn't *listening* to him, that I never listened to him, and that if I didn't do what he said, he didn't know what he might do.

At the bus stop he scurried around wildly, virtually on all fours,

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picking up cigarette butts and looking for money. Then he went to each of a half-dozen sidewalk newspaper kiosks and began putting quarters in them, taking out papers, and either stacking them on top of the kiosks, or putting them in a mailbox. He went back and forth to a pay phone, dialing for information about people on Staten Island and yelling at the operator; he walked across the street to a parking lot and shouted questions at me.

I had been in situations like this with Robert before—dozens of times through the past thirty years—and though, as I said to my children, seeing Robert like this was not new for me, each time it happened it took me by surprise, and each time it happened, it seemed unutterably sad and heartbreaking.

How could it be that somebody who was so warm and loving, so charming and happy one moment—one day, one hour—could become so angry and lost moments later? And how could it be that each time it happened—no matter the years gone by—it felt as if it were happening for the first time?

With the years, I've learned to cope with these situations—to be able to help me and Robert get through. Though with the years Robert has actually reversed the path his life had been on (despite the dreadful prognostications, he had come, in recent years, to be able to spend more time out of hospitals than in them, to have made more of a life for himself than most people had dreamt possible), I still found myself going through litanies of familiar questions and doubts: Should I call the local police and have them take him to a hospital and deal with getting him back to New York City? Should I ask Robert where he had been all night, and if he had been drinking, and if he thought he could get back to the city by himself? Should I leave my children and try to drive Robert the two hundred miles back to Staten Island?

What could I do that might ease his pain and confusion—that might minimize damage? If he were in free fall, as it were, was there anything I could do to help buffer the fall, so that, instead of plummeting downwards ten stories before he crashed, he could bounce down gently after, say, only falling a few steps? Should I say anything at all, and was there a right thing or wrong thing to say, and was there anyone I could call on who could help get us through? Or, was it better to say nothing and to just leave him be?

How much of what was going on with Robert was frightening my children or taking away from their celebration and reunion? Was it best to shield them from the worst of Robert's troubles? Or should I inform them more fully of what was happening—of my fears, and of my intentions? In a situation like this, despite the many times I'd

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been here before, and despite all that I thought I knew about myself and Robert and about how to handle these situations, what I felt most of all was an overwhelming sadness and helplessness. Who knew if there was anything at all that might ease things, or make them less awful? Who knew, really, what to do?

What I did finally—what I found myself doing—was what I've been doing more and more through the years: simply trusting my instincts, and Robert's. I found myself acting on my belief that, despite all, Robert still knew himself—even at a time like this—better than anyone else did, and that if he was determined to get back to Staten Island by himself, he would.

Robert had stayed far away from my children most of the time during his three days with us, and—his innate kindness, as ever, at work—had kept both his anger and his confusion hidden, for the most part, when in their presence. Still, each of them noticed what a hard time he was having, and each came to me and offered sympathy and help.

When, while changing from cap and gown into casual clothes for his graduation party, Eli asked if he could do anything to help with Robert, I told him the best thing he could do was to go off and enjoy the party, that Robert was my responsibility, not his. Eli had replied, "But he's mine, too, Pop."

I smiled. "Maybe," I said. "But today is your day. This one's on me, okay?"

My sense of the fear and humiliation (along with the logistical problems) that would result from having local agencies deal with getting Robert from Massachusetts to New York, or my trying to deal with him in a locked car for four or five hours (a week before his first breakdown in 1962, he had, while we were going seventy miles an hour on a highway, opened the car door and threatened to jump), reinforced my instincts to believe that the best immediate solution was the simplest one: to let Robert get back to his home by himself and as quickly as he could.

So I did what I usually do when things get bad for Robert. I tried, gently and firmly, to be as patient and direct with him as I could. I told him, for example, that I would call ahead to his halfway house to let them know he was on his way and asked him if he wanted me to drive him to Staten Island. When he came near to me—and when he walked off and seemed especially lost—I put my arms around him and talked to him and told him I loved him.

While people waiting for the bus stared, or tried not to stare, or moved away, Robert stayed close to me and seemed to be listening. I was glad he'd been able to visit, I said, and I wished he wasn't having

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such a hard time again, and we'd talk on the phone that evening after he was back at his halfway house, and I was very glad he'd been able to be here for Eli's graduation, and we would see one another again soon.

Robert navigated the long trip home—bus, subway, ferry, and bus—successfully. We spoke that night—he cried a lot, said he hoped he hadn't embarrassed my children, and then he was off on flights of words that, because I knew the reference points (events and people from our childhood, jokes we loved, experiences we'd been through together), seemed more poignant than strange. The following morning, for the first time in a year, and for at least the fiftieth time in his life, he was hospitalized.

When I called the doctor in charge of Robert's ward, he asked what I thought had precipitated Robert's break. I answered by saying that there were some immediate causes that seemed obvious, but that the real precipitant, it seemed to me, was simply the fact of Robert's life—of the last thirty-one years of his life. If you'd been where Robert had been, and had suffered all the drugs and abuse and incompetence and pain he had suffered, the wonder, it seemed to me, wasn't why he'd broken again, but why he hadn't, like so many others he'd known, died or killed himself or deteriorated completely.

But after I said this, I did name some of the things that had been going on in Robert's life that might have precipitated this break. There was the graduation and being with family (but Robert had been in this situation dozens of times before and had had no difficulties). There were his desires and fantasies about living with me in Massachusetts, now intensified because Eli would be going off to college and I would be living alone. (But I've been the single full-time parent of three for many years, and though Robert had often asked about moving in with me, I'd never encouraged him, and he himself had been saying he didn't think it a good idea.) There was the fact that, a few weeks before, Robert's best friend had been moved out of the home in which he and Robert had lived together for two years and to which Robert had been hoping to return soon (so where would he live now?). There was also the fact that he had been out of the hospital for eleven months, and the better he became—the more alert, the more himself—the less the make-work activities of the hospital's day center interested him, and the more bored he became.

Though I could, as ever, talk about what I thought had caused Robert's condition, long-term and short-term, the more important question, it seemed to me, wasn't what had caused this breakdown, or any of the others, but what, given his life, had enabled him to survive, and to do more than survive—to retain his generosity, his warmth, his

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humor, and his sense of self. This, it seemed to me, was the true miracle and mystery.

I had, not long before, asked Robert the same questions the doctor asked me. Did he ever have any sense of what made him go off the way he did sometimes—of what the difference was, of what made things change for him, or in him? He had been silent for a long time and then had said, "No answer."

These were, I said at once, afraid that my questions might have hurt him, questions for which nobody seemed to have the answers.

"So why should I know?" Robert said then. "Am I different from anybody else?"

The doctor concluded that Robert's breakdown had been precipitated by alcohol and substance abuse. Robert had admitted that, on the way up to visit me, he had had a few beers and had inhaled amyl nitrite. The alcohol and substance abuse, the doctor said, had destabilized the parts of Robert's brain that his medications—lithium and Depakote—had stabilized. The problem, therefore, was non-compliance.

I had heard this from doctors many times before, and I responded with the obvious question: Okay, but what was it that had caused the non-compliance? If mental illness was as debilitating and awful a condition as it seemed to be (as surely it had been for Robert), and if the medications alleviated that condition, why would anyone ever stop taking the medications, or do anything to interfere with their beneficial effects? As my father had once put it, to a doctor who refused to continue treating Robert because Robert had stopped taking his pills, "So where, Doctor, is the pill to make him want to take the pills?"

When I visited Robert after his breakdown, on a locked unit at South Beach Psychiatric Center on Staten Island, he was, as he had been before, on isolation: living, day after day, twenty-four hours a day, in a bare room in which there was nothing but a bed and a dresser. This was called "reduced stimulation."

When I had previously questioned, as gently as I could, whether being on isolation, and on heavy doses of Thorazine (which Robert hated above all drugs), and not being permitted to make or receive calls or visitors, might not feel to Robert like punishment instead of therapy, the staff psychologist had replied that this might temporarily be the case. "But our experience," he said, "is that in retrospect patients come to appreciate the reduction of stimulation—the limits and boundaries that have been set for them."

He had also assured me that Robert was not just locked away in a

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room—that every hour on the half hour, for five minutes, he was taken to the bathroom and for a walk down the hallway. When I asked if Robert had or would be receiving any therapy, the therapist's reply was abrupt: "Robert cannot tolerate therapy."

This seemed to me an absurd statement—Robert couldn't tolerate therapy? You mean *you* can't tolerate trying to work with him, I wanted to scream. Why are you a therapist if you don't want to work with patients, to listen to them? And when will Robert be able to "tolerate" therapy—when he's *well*?

But it was the same old story, and I was in the same old quandary: if I complained too much, or confronted the hospital's staff with their inadequacies, or sent off the letters I composed in my head, I feared they would only talk with me less, care for Robert less.

Robert had been here, in this ward and ones like it, and in even worse places more than once before. (One time at Mid-Hudson, I remembered him telling me, when they had him in a straitjacket for a long period of time, he asked for a smoke so he could let the ashes fall on the jacket and set himself on fire. He succeeded. After the aides got him out of the straitjacket, one of them took him to the basement, beat him up, warned him never to do what he had done again.)

Now, because of my visit, Robert has been granted courtyard privileges, and we sit by ourselves in the small courtyard at a picnic table. He opens the bag of food I've brought for him for lunch, but his hands are shaking so badly that when he tries to eat an egg salad sandwich, the egg salad sprays everywhere. He is apologetic and embarrassed. I talk with him easily, we joke back and forth, and after a short while I scoop up pieces of egg, tomato, lettuce, and bread, he takes his false teeth out, and I feed him with my fingers, placing the food directly into his mouth.

When he cannot stand the shaking, he walks away. He calls to me, and I sit next to him on a bench, and we talk about the ward, and the doctors, and my trip down, about Eli's graduation, and the floods in the Midwest, and our cousins. Suddenly Robert turns, leans down, and, with great gentleness, kisses the back of my hand several times, after which he begins weeping.

"Oh, Jay, Jay," he cries softly. "They're barbarians here. Barbarians, barbarians! Pavlovians. . . . "

He presses his mouth to the back of my hand, and I take him to me, hold him close. A few minutes later, we walk around the courtyard. Then he tells me that he likes to walk back and forth, in a diagonal, between two trees—they are about ten yards apart—and count the number of times. So we walk back and forth together, and I

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sing to him, and then he joins in—putting his arm around my waist, leaning on my shoulder—and we go back and forth again and again, loudly singing old camp songs we remember from our childhood.

He eats some more, and then we walk again, side by side, our hands clasped behind us, mimicking two diplomats, trading stories and news. He clutches his dentures in one hand, a piece of bread locked in their bite, and when he puts the top bridge back in his mouth, I say something about his being on uppers.

He starts giggling, inserts the lower bridge.

"And now you're on lowers," I say, and add that I don't understand why, since he's on uppers and lowers, which probably balance one another, the hospital has to give him any other medications.

"It's how they make their profit," he says.

When I call Robert from Massachusetts after our visit, he is flying—repeating everything he says twice, rambling on about people living and dead as if they are there with him on the ward, thanking me for visiting him and for the things I brought him, giving me lists of all the foods he has eaten and all the things he wants me to send him, mixing these lists with references to scenes in movies and scenes from our childhood, talking about Adlai Stevenson and Bill Clinton (who is, he says, his son) and how the whole country is in a very big depression—and all the while he keeps telling me he has to hang up, he has to hang up. When he finally takes a breath, and I tell him I love him, his voice suddenly drops and slows down, and he talks to me in a way that is entirely natural. "Oh Jay," he says, "don't you see? There's nothing better in my life than what's happening! You don't know. You don't know, Jay. You don't *want* to know. . . . " He weeps freely, keeps talking. "This life of working here and there in hospitals, or as a volunteer, and being here now, and doing nothing—isn't there ever going to be anything *better* for me? Please get me out of here, Jay. Please, please. . . . "

When, later in our conversation, I tell him that I called him the day before but nobody could find him, he asks me what I called him, and when I say, "I called you my brother," he laughs, says, "That's an old one, Jay. That's an old one—but listen, I'm going to switch the phone to my good ear, all right?"

"There," he says, a few seconds later. "Now can you hear me better?"

Moved as I am by Robert's situation and his life—and his plea for a life different from the one he has—I find, after our visit and our talk, that I am feeling relieved, and, even, mildly exhilarated. Because the truth (I shrug when I realize this, as if to say, to myself: What can I do? That's the way it is.) is that when we're together, whether in my home

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or on his ward, whether on the West Side of Manhattan (where we lived next door to one another during his first year out of Creedmoor) or in Atlantic City (where, six weeks before Eli's graduation, we went together for two days at his request to celebrate his fiftieth birthday), we're happy. Not always, and not without a pervasive sense of loss and sadness, but happy to be with each other, no matter the context, because, it seems good, simply, in an often frightening and miserable life, to be *known* and to be able to be near the person who knows you and is known by you.

During the weeks that follow Robert's hospitalization, we talk regularly. I visit him and send notes and gifts, and whenever we talk, Robert asks about each of my children, his niece and two nephews. Though our talks sometimes last for less than a minute, and though sometimes he is angry (at doctors, at me, at life) and sometimes sad, and sometimes high—and though sometimes I am nearly swept away by grief, from my sense of all that *he* senses his life has become and has not become—I find, strangely enough, real pleasure, as ever, in our time spent together.

This happens not only because I know Robert's patterns, if patterns they are, fairly well, but because I know that once his sense of humor returns (and once he begins opening up to me in direct ways about his feelings and needs), his recovery will follow and that he will be back before long in the "real" world most of us live in. It happens simply because, that is, for better or worse, our lives, in a crucial time for each of us, have once again been joined.

In a few months, Robert will probably, as in the past, get out of his ward and return to his halfway house. If things go well there, he will move from the halfway house into an apartment, and we'll probably go to Atlantic City together again, and we'll see each other more frequently than ever. We'll talk and laugh and trade jokes, argue and complain and become irritable with one another, reminisce and make plans and go on trips. And he'll gradually tell me, without my asking (as he has already begun to do), about what he did and where he went on the night of Eli's graduation, and that too will become part of the history we share.

The more I know about him, the more I'll wonder about how he came to be who he is. What continues to surprise—but why?—is that the more I know Robert and know about him, the more I'll want to know. And this will only increase, not the sadness of his life, but its wonder.

Several weeks after Eli's graduation, while Robert is still on isolation in his ward at South Beach, I come across a full-page advertise-

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ment in the *New York Times* sponsored by NARSAD (the National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression), an organization founded by the four most prominent mental health groups in the United States, that talks about "the many urgent scientific projects that are paving the way for better treatments and the cure we all hope for." *The* cure? I want to scream. "New hope of a breakthrough cure is on the horizon," the ad proclaims, "as we start to identify the genetic markers that cause depression."

The ad sets forth the current and conventional wisdom about depression and mental illness: its symptoms, the suffering it brings, the numbers of people afflicted. What the ad says echoes what I've read in most literature put out by mental health professionals and agencies: that mental illness is a "biochemical illness" and a "no-fault biologically based brain disease."

Surely, thinking of mental illness in this way—believing that biology causes mental illness (as it causes diabetes or heart disease, illnesses to which it is compared) and that nobody's to blame—does enormous good: it reduces stigma and guilt, it inspires hope, it allows for increased coverage under insurance plans, it enables useful legislation and research, and so on.

What it does *not* do, however, is deal directly with the major fact of mental illness for those who suffer its larger devastations: its generally long-term, chronic character and how this is experienced, as on Eli's graduation night, by the mentally ill and by those who care for them.

Robert and I have been hearing talk about "breakthrough cures" for more than thirty years now. First it was electroshock, and then it was insulin coma therapy, and then it was family therapy, and then it was the new range of anti-psychotic drugs, and then it was mega-dose vitamin therapy, and then it was lithium therapy, and then it was anti-convulsant therapy, and then it was Prozac, and then it was clozapine.

What upset me in the *Times* ad—what upsets me whenever I hear language about breakthrough cures and genetic markers and brain disease—is not the possibility that Robert's condition is chemical, but the belief so many people have in its corollary: that if the condition is chemical, it can be corrected with chemicals. Oh how easy it would be for everybody if there were chemical causes and chemical cures! How free of responsibility we might all be then!

But even if we find cause and cure, what then do we do with the life lived, and the history—and fear, and shame, and doubt, and despair, and sheer misery—that have accompanied that life? If behavior and feelings can change the chemistry and patterns of the brain (compare the feelings and physiological changes in athletes, musicians, stockbrokers, writers, artists, and others when in intensely pro-

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ductive periods), just as chemicals can change behavior and feelings, how can we know which is cause and which effect?

The instant I see the words about breakthrough cures, and read about how NARSAD has provided financial support to 315 doctors and scientists in 78 leading universities, medical schools, and research institutions, what I also see, but more vividly, is my brother, in a room by himself, lying in bed hour after hour and day after day, trembling from medications and fear and loneliness.

In a realm where the relation of mind to body remains so complex and mysterious, why, I wonder yet again, is so much time and money spent in the search for chemical and organic causes and cures, while back on the ward patients languish and die for the simple lack of human attention to their ordinary, daily needs?

For even if we do one day separate out the gene or the neuron that proves to be the cause of what we decide is this or that species of mental illness, what, then, will we do about the life that has come before and will continue after the moment of diagnosis and medication, and of how the fact of having this condition has affected an individual's history?

Hope and research are fine, and genuine gains have been made. But meanwhile, back on the ward, Robert has to sneak out of his room to telephone me, and his doctors never call me to inform or consult or confer, and the only link to the outside world for thirty or so acutely psychotic patients is a single pay phone. Meanwhile, back on the ward, important messages don't get through. (When Robert, for the first time in his life, threatened suicide, and I informed one of the nurses, and I called back a few days later to speak with Robert's doctor, I discovered that the doctor had never been informed of Robert's threat.) Meanwhile, back on the ward, the major activities are TV and Bingo, the staff is outnumbered and overworked, the refrigerator is padlocked, and the only time patients can get snacks is when an aide unlocks it twice a day at "refrigerator time."

As it was, for the most part, thirty years ago, so it is now: the little that passes for therapy is simply reward and punishment done up, if at all, in the guise of crude behavior modification programs whose aim is not enhancement, but containment and neutralization. In the world Robert too often lives in, ordinary habits and idiosyncracies (sloppiness about clothing, loud talking) become psychological deficits for which one receives demerits, and worse. In the world Robert has been living in for too many years, model patients are not very different from model prisoners.

At least, I say to Robert, during one conversation, they don't use straitjackets anymore. When I say this, we both laugh, and talk about

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the time he asked a friend visiting him at Creedmoor if she could take his dirty clothes home for him and get them washed. The friend took Robert's laundry bag to a Chinese laundry, started removing the clothes, only to find that mixed in with the dirty socks and underwear was Robert's straitjacket.

"In the old days it was straitjackets and wet sheets and electricity," Robert says, "and now, I guess, it's isolation and injections."

A few weeks before Eli's graduation, I had asked Robert why he thought it was that he had survived when so many others he knew, from Creedmoor and Mid-Hudson and South Beach and Hillside, never got out, or killed themselves, or deteriorated to the point of no return. Had it ever occurred to him to wonder why, despite all he had been through and all the drugs and therapies that had been poured into him, he had not gone under? Why was he able, more than three decades after his first breakdown (when he tried to kill our father; when he hallucinated extravagantly; when he believed he was being taken, by ambulance, to my funeral; when he tried to chew his tongue out of his mouth; when he was straitjacketed and shot up with large doses of Thorazine; when he had catatonic seizures), to make a life for himself that was so much better than often, during these decades, seemed likely?

"Well," he exclaimed, "I had wonderful parents!" He laughed, then was silent for a while. When he spoke again, his voice was warm, thoughtful. "I just wanted to survive and persist," he said. "That's all. And—I don't know—but it's like Faulkner said in the speech he made, for the Nobel, remember?—I wanted to *endure* somehow. I never really wanted to stay on the wards, but I'd get there and then the minute they locked the door on me, I would think, 'Oh my God—I've got to get out of here!' But then I'd throw fits and stuff.

"And also," he added, smiling, "because my brother didn't want to keep visiting me in hospitals."

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Wet Stones

TIMOTHY E. THATCHER

The call came at three,
a tiny voice on the phone,
asking simply, "Can you come?
He was in his chair, reading.
I checked on him. And he's gone."
A sunny afternoon, so bright
it almost hurt: July 5, 1991,
the day my second father died,
my mother's second husband,
the second love of her life,
thirty feet from where my Dad had
fallen, twenty-five years before.
Then she'd heard the fall,
but this time there was silence.
Driving home (the only home
I've ever known) I lived
another life that ended
when I saw her face and held her.
She seemed so small, smaller
than a mother ever should be,
and I, her son, afraid I'd break
her more than she'd been broken.
Two policemen stood at the door,
nice men, quiet and efficient,
who warned me that the body was
still there, still on the floor,
the rescue squad already departed,
the morticians yet to arrive.
She led me by the hand to sit
with him, like a brave child
afraid of the dark but drawn to it,

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leading a parent to the fearful closet.
He lay next to his favorite chair,
and all the old clichés were true:
he was absent, the paperboy who made
his way alone by the age of twelve,
the army major beginning as a private,
on to sergeant and through
the ranks to command battalions,
the builder, the father, the husband,
Edward Charles Vernon, Sr.
She placed her hand gently on
his chest and left it there,
as if the hand had fallen errantly,
a dry yet weighted leaf against his skin,
and searched for the face she'd known.
His eyes were open slightly,
slitted against the slanting light
canting through the room.
Amazingly, the sun still shone,
bright in the west, bright
on the gray carpet where he lay.
All the darkness one expects
with death was in his eyes,
not shrouded on the rug and chairs
—a fuzzy, unfocused dark, blurred,
neither closet-deep nor clear.
Unlike wet stones, dead eyes expose
no light, not even by reflection;
they draw light in but never
give it back, creating shallow dark,
a murk without a surface.
We looked into my second father's face,
and behind his opaque gaze,
I could see the reason for her search.
She was remembering what was gone,
fixing it forever in the pale light
of her own eyes: those clear, wet stones.

✪ TIMOTHY E. THATCHER, who is currently working on a novel, lives in Puyallup, Washington. "Wet Stones" is the thirteenth winner of the Mary Elinore Smith Poetry Prize. This prize is given in memory of Miss Smith by her family and friends. Mary Elinore Smith, who died in 1981, was an editor of THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR.

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How Not to Make a Stradivarius

THOMAS LEVENSON

IT IS ONLY A COINCIDENCE—or rather, mostly so—that Isaac Newton, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Antonio Stradivari reached the pinnacles of their professions at almost exactly the same moment in history. Their lives and work did not touch, though at times they almost intersected. Newton's fascination with the tempered scale overlapped with Bach's. Bach's omnivorous musical interests extended to the labor of instrument design and construction that was Stradivari's lifework. And Stradivari (also known by the Latin form of his name, Stradivarius), in the course of his seventy years as a master luthier and builder of violins, violas, and cellos, applied a craftsman's version of Newton's scientific method, deriving by experiment the skills needed to create the finest stringed instruments ever built.

But the three men never met, and if their lives show some common heritage, it is because the ideas that moved them moved their times, forming a common currency of inquiry and change across Europe. The real collision among the three of them came much later. Taken as a drama, it is Stradivari who plays the lead. His is a story of mystery. The core principle of the new experimental science was that what one person can discover any other can find again; yet for three centuries no one has been able to do what Stradivari did—build an instrument that reproduces the range, power, and expressiveness of the Stradivari sound. As the attempt to isolate the secrets of Stradivari's accomplishment proceeded over the years, the unmistakable individual character of his instruments became the embodiment, the physical evidence of a heresy: there are, there could be, strictly defined limits to the amount of precision with which Newton's scientific apparatus can account for the material world. As far as cello and

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violin making goes, Stradivari did not merely use Newton's methods, he exhausted them.

The story begins within a handful of workshops concerned simply with the difficulty of meeting a novel set of demands in the music business. The entire violin family—violin, viola, and cello—was rather a latecomer to the suite of "classical" orchestral instruments. The earliest violins had just three strings, and they show up in paintings from Milan in the first decade of the sixteenth century. The first true, four-string violins appear a few years later, with the rest of the family making their way on stage at about the same time—there is a fresco at Saronno Cathedral dating from about 1535, that shows both a viola and a cello. Initially, there was just a whiff of the vulgar around such instruments. The violin itself evolved out of several fiddlelike Renaissance instruments, in particular the rebec and the lira da braccio (literally, the arm lyre), used most commonly for dancing or for accompanying singers. In its early years, the violin served much the same function: professional musicians used them to provide entertainment for hire. Serious music for strings belonged to the members of the older, more distinguished viol family—instruments that use a bow on their strings, like the violins, but that have frets, like guitars. As the sixteenth-century writer (and snob) Jambe de Fer put it: "We call viols those with which gentlemen, merchants and other virtuous people pass their time. . . . The other type is called violin; it is commonly used for dancing."

Renaissance dance music did not put any extraordinary demands on the violin or the violinist, but as the sixteenth century wore on, the rich and the powerful began to cultivate their leisure—and the music with which they filled their easy hours. Beginning in about 1550, demand for high-quality musical instruments was great enough to support a growing number of master craftsmen: skilled workers whose product could command the highest prices. The first known great violin maker was Andrea Amati of Cremona. Along with his contemporary, Gasparo da Saló of Brescia, Amati began to create instruments with individual, distinct voices—far superior to the fiddles that dancing teachers used to put their pupils through their paces. Such fine workmanship fed an international market.

By 1600, violin makers had appeared in most of the major kingdoms of Europe. But the craft was advancing fastest in a few towns in northern Italy, especially Amati's Cremona, a small city southeast of Milan, near the Po River. Amati was the patriarch of the Cremonese violin trade, founding a family of violin makers that included his sons Antonio and Girolamo. With his grandson Niccolò, the Amatis' violin-making skills reached their peak. Niccolò was also the best teacher of

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his day, training most of the Cremonese master builders of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

By the time Niccolò reached the prime of his career, in the middle 1600s, the Amati family, along with the other makers clustered in Cremona, had managed to create instruments that set the standard for musical performance at the time, violins that possessed a recognized, highly valued combination of versatility and beauty. Well-made Cremonese instruments produced (and generate still) an excellent tone—bright and clear—and violins in general were far more flexible, capable of producing types of sound for dramatic effect different than the older, more cumbersome viols. The range of sound and feeling that the newer instruments could express speeded up the spread of the violin family throughout musical Europe. Violins and violas came to dominate the emerging field of opera orchestras, and composers working in new forms like the sonata and the concerto wrote an ever larger repertoire specifically for the upstart violin.

Up to this time, the latter half of the seventeenth century, the production and refinement of the violin seemed to hold no fundamental mystery. Different makers experimented with instrument design, attempting to match their product to changing patterns of use. In their hands the violin evolved, pushed forward by makers who knew what they wanted to hear and how to get it. Early violins, for example, often possessed a sweet tone but a small voice. The lack of power did not matter as long as violins remained within the drawing room or a smallish dance hall. But with the growth in popularity of the violin, the best builders began to explore the sonic potential of their instruments by experimenting with a variety of designs. Niccolò Amati, for example, altered the family pattern, building violins with larger bodies, whose sound was capable of filling a large room from front to back, while retaining his family's prized excellence of tone and nuance—and other makers found other solutions, variations in the shapes of their instruments, to achieve similar results.

The violin makers of the seventeenth century had as clear a sense of the connection between cause and effect as did any of their more formally learned contemporaries, who were carrying on the scientific revolution. The habits of thought and experimental practice on either side were essentially the same: Niccolò clearly understood the link between the acoustics of resonating chambers (the violin body) and the amplitude—volume—of the sound one could produce with different resonators. Systematic trials produced an instrument that worked, using the pattern suggested by Isaac Newton himself, according to his familiar inductive reasoning, the method of analysis that proceeded by experiment and observation. Presumably, knowledge

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and skill would continue to accumulate, generating a continued, steady, comprehensible improvement in violin design and construction, leading ultimately to the Newtonian goal, the discovery of the "laws" of violin making.

Certainly, such a course of events seemed to hold for the violin's larger sibling, the cello. The cello, the bass member of the violin family, is pitched an octave and a fourth below the violin, with its lowest string usually tuned to the C two octaves below the piano's middle C. The early history of the cello was actually less promising than that of the violin. Like the smaller instrument, the cello suffered the social stigma of vulgar entertainment—it even endured the humiliation of having holes drilled in its back to accommodate the strap that allowed it to be used in marching bands and public processions. Solo cello music dates back to the 1620s, but the cello's primary job early on was to join with a keyboard instrument—harpsichord or organ—to provide the musical foundation for a piece while a singer's voice, a violin, or some other instrument grabbed the soloist's glory. The combination of cello and keyboard was called the *continuo* in that it provided a continuing accompaniment for the solo line of a composition. The cello often performed this role in church, joining the organ to play the bass lines of a growing repertoire of religiously inspired chamber music. The need to produce a lot of sound to fill a church dictated the fundamental design choices for the early cellos; they had to be loud, hence large.

Thus, virtually all cellos built before 1680 were substantially larger than those in use today. The earliest surviving cellos date from the middle of the sixteenth century, all six of them made by Andrea Amati—including one, called "the King," that was probably part of Charles IX's set of instruments. Originally its body was very large by modern standards, more than thirty-one inches long, compared with the current usual length of about twenty-eight to thirty inches. ("The King" itself now measures 29 $\frac{11}{16}$ inches; most of the old oversized cellos were cut down to the newer standard in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.) While they lasted, cellos of this size produced a fine, powerful voice, strengthening especially the deeper notes of the instrument. But the price paid for volume was that such cellos were relatively difficult to play: the distance between the notes on the fingerboard meant that cellists could not perform with anything like the facility of violinists and violists.

The situation began to shift around the middle of the seventeenth century. Composers began to write more and more music—secular as well as religious—that specifically called for the church bass, the large cello, instead of the equivalent member of the viol family, the viol da

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gamba, until by the end of the century enough music existed to support a few full-time professional cellists. Those players in their turn sought opportunities to perform the same kind of solo parts that the violinists already enjoyed. Composers like Corelli were willing enough to oblige with music that emphasized strong cello lines, but the church version of the cello was not adequate to the task. The violin had evolved relatively slowly to meet the changing requirements of the music it was supposed to make. By the 1680s, such incremental change would not do for the cello; what was needed was a radical reconfiguration of the instrument.

Niccolò Amati died in 1684, just before these pressures forced the development of a new form for the instrument. But throughout his life, Niccolò trained a series of apprentices, virtually all of whom, it seems, caught their master's willingness to experiment. In 1656, or thereabouts, Niccolò, then sixty years old, accepted one more boy into his workshop, a youth of twelve or a little older, whose work would culminate in what would become the definitive design for the modern cello. His name was Antonio Stradivari.

Very little is known about Stradivari's early years—there are no records of his birth nor any mention in parish registers of baptism. The first hint of his existence comes from his work. A violin made in 1666 bears his label and adds that the maker was an "alumnus Nicolai Amati"—one of Niccolò's students. (Stradivari actually made that customary acknowledgment of his teacher in only one surviving instrument—all his subsequent instruments, even those made while working for Amati, bear his name alone.) Lacking much in the way of conventional documentary evidence, Stradivari's biographers, Henry, Arthur, and Alfred Hill, reconstructed the first stages of his career based on the traditional sequence of an apprentice's training, combined with the initially scattered testimony of the instruments in which they could detect Stradivari's hand. A skilled beginner could produce complete instruments of his or her own three to five years after entering a master craftsman's shop, which means, according to the Hill brothers, that Stradivari probably made his first instruments around 1660. Certainly, by the middle of the decade, his work was prized enough to attract commissions of his own, independent of the orders coming in to the Amati concern. Nonetheless, Stradivari seems to have remained in Niccolò's workshop until 1680, when the older man probably retired, at the age of eighty-four.

Up until that time, Stradivari built instruments that followed the basic Amati pattern, but once on his own, and then more rapidly after Niccolò's death, he accelerated his lifelong process of innovation. Much of the 1680s seems to have been spent refining craft skills:

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instruments from the end of the decade show the most precise carving, fitting, and workmanship Stradivari had achieved to that date; the Hill brothers point to the "Tuscan" violin, made in 1690, as an example of the finest craftsmanship Stradivari ever produced.

In the 1690s, though, Stradivari embarked on a rapid series of experiments. Seeking the power and depth Niccolò had aimed for with his large-model violins, Stradivari went one better, building six (known) instruments that are longer, wider, and occasionally deeper than anything else he ever built. The instruments did not work out as planned—they gained volume and strength in the lower notes at the cost of the bright and lively tone both the Amatis and Stradivari had sought. So Stradivari took the next step, producing a series of violins on what is now called the long-strad pattern: instruments that retained the length of his massive earlier version but were cut narrower and thinner, back to front, than previously. They played better than his previous attempt but still fell short of the sound he required. Finally, around the turn of the century, he began building shorter violins shaped to a flatter curve than that favored by the Amatis for the arching on the backs and bellies of the instruments. These became the classic "golden period" instruments—possessed of the combination of power and clarity of tone that created the Stradivari reputation as the finest violin maker in the history of the instrument. (His only rival in prestige and price, at least, was and remains Giuseppe Guarneri del Gesù, the grandson of another of Niccolò Amati's apprentices. Several great violinists, including Paganini and currently Isaac Stern, have preferred his instruments to Stradivari's.)

In contrast to his almost feverish pursuit of new ideas for his violins, however, Stradivari seems to have paid relatively little attention to the cello. He made several, beginning in 1680, but until 1701 he always followed the older style, producing large, loud instruments. Then, for six years, he ceased making any cellos at all. He left no explanation for the break, though the success of his violin experiments and the growing volume of his business may simply have distracted him. But in part, he seems to have spent the time surveying the landscape, considering the next direction to take. Beginning in the 1690s, a few Cremonese makers had begun to experiment with the cello form, coming up with different, smaller patterns in an effort to meet the demand of professional cellists seeking a more playable instrument than the older, so-called church basses. Stradivari almost certainly came into contact with such prototype instruments, becoming familiar with the fundamental problem of preserving a big bass sound in the new form. In 1707, he produced his response, building the first of a series of instruments that set the standard form for all

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modern cellos. The cello of 1707 represented a breakthrough: less than thirty inches long, it was compact enough to permit a performance that was swift and precise without sacrificing its quality of sound. As the Hill brothers wrote: "The supreme merit of violoncellos of this type . . . consists in the exactitude of [their] proportions. . . . They stand alone in representing the exact dimensions necessary for the production of a standard of tone which combines the maximum of power with the utmost refinement of quality, leaving nothing to be desired: bright, full and crisp, yet free from any suspicion of either nasal or metallic tendency."

By the time Stradivari began producing his small-form cellos, he was already recognized as the premier instrument builder in Europe, frequently receiving aristocratic, even royal commissions, back ordered to the point that the wait for one of his instruments stretched over years (even for kings). Consequently, even while Stradivari was alive and working, his prices tended to be considerably more than a working musician with no private fortune could afford—and the gap separating the performer from the instrument has widened ever since. About fifty Stradivari cellos still exist, about half of which reached the perfection of form and sound that the Hills praised. These instruments have become legendary—the stuff of romantic ardor and of the mythic aura that surrounds Stradivari to this day. During the nineteenth century in particular, Stradivari cellos seemed to mimic the (imagined) roles of the great divas of melodramatic fictions: they were desired but never truly possessed by rich men—who, for the sake of art, had to surrender them to their poor but honest lovers.

The Piatti cello, made in 1720, gained its name from its most famous nineteenth-century owner, the great Italian cellist Alfredo Piatti. In 1867, Piatti paid one of his frequent visits to a friend in London, a Colonel Oliver, a collector of old cellos. At the time the colonel owned three—the Stradivari, and Amati, and an instrument made by the fine Venetian maker Domenico Montagnana. After Piatti played each, his host asked him which he preferred. "One cannot have a doubt," Piatti said. "The Stradivari." The musician left the collector and returned to his rooms—only to find that the prized Stradivari followed him home. Such gestures have continued to accompany Stradivari instruments, even in the late twentieth century. The Davidov cello of 1712 has three times been bought by wealthy amateurs and then given to brilliant professionals. First, Count Wielhorsky traded a Guaneri cello, 40,000 francs, and his best horse for the Stradivari, which he then offered to the leading Russian cellist of the day, Karl Davidov. In the 1960s, a wealthy benefactor bought

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the cello for Jacqueline Du Pré, the spectacular English cellist whose career was cut short by multiple sclerosis. Finally, when Yo Yo Ma, to whom Du Pré had loaned the cello after she ceased to perform, could not afford to purchase the instrument on his own, another rich music lover bought it (through a foundation) for Ma's use for the rest of his life.

The reason these cellos have had such colorful lives, of course, is because they produce a uniquely beautiful sound and range of expression. The best way to get some sense of what makes them so prized is to listen to them, at concerts if possible, otherwise on disk. For just two of many choices, Ma will be recording the Bach cello suites, for the second time in his career, in 1995. That will permit listeners to compare a Stradivari to another fine instrument, a cello built in 1733 by the Venetian maker Montagnana, that Ma used on his first recordings of those works. Additionally, Mstislav Rostropovich's recordings of Benjamin Britten's solo cello works show off the extraordinary range of both the performer and his 1711 Stradivari cello.

But hearing what has made Stradivari instruments the objects of such desire merely begs the next question: What makes his cellos perform as they do, outplaying those of other makers? If we abandon the benefit of hindsight, Stradivari appears simply to have continued the steady progress of innovation and improvement begun 150 years earlier by Andrea Amati. Only in retrospect do his instruments appear to us to have reached a peak that no one before or since has managed to scale. Montagnana of Venice followed Stradivari and succeeded in building cellos that produce a beautiful sound. But in general, after Stradivari's death in 1737, the tradition of fine instrument building withered in Cremona, and the other centers of the craft in Italy never matched the extraordinary flowering that culminated in Stradivari's career. That is his true mystery: What did he do to climb that peak—and why have his successors been unable to match, much less surpass, that accomplishment?

The answer to the first part of that question—what Stradivari did as he made his instruments—is actually well known. The cello, after all, is simply a machine for making a particular set of sounds. As such, how any cello works, including Stradivari's, can be analyzed in detail. It, like all the members of the violin family, generates a note when a string is plucked or stroked by a bow, setting up a rapid vibration along the length of the string. Such vibration produces almost no sound in itself—one violin maker has compared it to the act of fanning the air with a toothpick. Instead, a carved arch of wood, called the bridge, that fits between the cello's top and its strings transmits that motion from the strings to the cello's top plate, known as its

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belly. The sides of the instrument—called ribs, as the anatomical metaphor persists—transfer the belly's oscillations down to the cello's back, as does the sound post, a piece of wood that is wedged (not glued or fixed) between the two plates. The bass bar, a long and thin strip of wood glued to the inside of the belly, alters the way the cello top responds to the pressure of the bridge, both strengthening the structure and shaping the tone of the instrument.

At that moment, with both the back and the belly in motion, the body of the cello acts as a resonating chamber, amplifying the original vibration—the note—produced by the stroke of a bow on the string. Critically, the bits of wood that create that resonant box do not all flex in a single, continuous motion. Doing so would produce a sound with most of the energy concentrated around a single wavelength, or pitch—what is called the fundamental. Flutes can produce nearly pure fundamental tones, as can Pythagorean monochords. But most instruments create a sound that includes both the fundamental and its series of overtones, which combine to generate what musicians call the color of a note, its particular timbre and complexity. A cello string generates a series of partial tones by itself: in addition to the wave formed by flexing up and down once along its entire length, it can vibrate twice along its length, sounding the first overtone, an octave above the fundamental; it can bend three times, forming the second overtone, a fifth higher than the second—and so on, following the sequence Pythagoras himself identified.

The overtone series for each note struck on a cello gets amplified along with the fundamental, but the behavior of the cello's body determines which overtones get emphasized and which fade. The cello's various components respond to the motion of the string by bending and bowing interactively, communicating vibrations back and forth. The particular intensity of the different patterns of movement determines how much of the energy put into the system by the stroke of the bow reaches each wavelength, each partial of the tone being played. That distribution of energy from the fundamental up across the entire overtone series creates the actual sound, a complex note with the particular qualities of richness, color, and nuance that each instrument displays. Finally—and instantly, following the stroke of the bow—the original motion of the string, now transformed into an oscillating mass of air within the resonating body of the cello, emerges from the two f-shaped holes carved into the instrument's belly. That vibration sweeps outward, filling a room, sounding a note.

If that note emerges from a Stradivari cello, it will have a distinct, identifiable set of characteristics. The myth of Stradivari has it that he possessed some mysterious gift that enabled him to massage his con-

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structions into the realm of the miraculous. But the reality is more prosaic: to put it in the language of physical acoustics, what makes Stradivari instruments extraordinary is the particular mix of overtones and fundamentals they produce, along with the capacity of the finest instruments to generate many different such mixes. Accompanying such qualities of tone, Stradivari's cellos also possess an exceptional (though not unique) ability to produce sound that carries and is able to fill even very large halls. Stradivari achieved those results by experimenting with each of the major variables that shape the performance of the machine that is a cello. His process (if not its result) holds almost no mysteries: Stradivari was essentially a craftsman of science, one with considerable, demonstrable knowledge of mathematics and acoustical physics. The surviving physical evidence of both the instruments themselves and the tools used to build them, combined with the analysis of the detailed design of his best creations, has made it possible to retrace, to a surprising degree, the sequence of intellectual and technological ideas Stradivari used to create his unique cellos. We know what he did—we have the instruments and we know almost completely how he did it.

That knowledge has emerged from over a century of research on two fronts: an archaeological approach that tries to recover the step-by-step sequence of Stradivari's craftsmanship, and an analytical attack that seeks to identify the underlying physics that could cause a machine like a cello to produce a sound like Stradivari's. The best description of Stradivari's methods was assembled over a lifetime of investigation by Simone Sacconi, a violin maker, restorer, and copier. Sacconi was a devotee in a one-man cult whose deity was Stradivari. He committed himself to his life's work when he was eight: at that age he opened up a violin owned by his father, an orchestra violinist, to see how it worked. His father sensibly safeguarded his remaining instruments by enrolling Sacconi in a violin-making apprenticeship. He encountered his first Stradivari when he was thirteen. He measured and drew it and continued to study and copy Stradivari instruments for the next sixty years. Finally, in 1972, he published his conclusions under the mocking title *The "Secrets" of Stradivari.*

According to Sacconi's reconstruction of the process, Stradivari started each project by drawing the outline of the instrument called for on paper; he then built a mold out of wood that could serve as a template for the construction process to follow. Such molds revealed Stradivari's scientific side, at least to Sacconi. He found that Stradivari clearly understood and used quite advanced mathematical ideas, deriving the precise proportions of his molds by working through several geometrical operations. Having fixed the outline of an instru-

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ment and built the mold, the next step, as Sacconi reconstructed it, was to build the sides of the instruments, the ribs. Stradivari worked with strips of maple, as thin as one millimeter, using a hot iron and humidity to shape the ribs around the hourglass curves of the instrument.

The next major task was to carve the back and belly into the correct form. Bellies were made of spruce or occasionally fir; backs, like the ribs, were usually made of maple, though some cellos used poplar or willow wood. That wood may have been treated, aged, or seasoned—one theory suggests that wood stored in Venetian canals, for example, would have encountered microbes that could alter the acoustical properties of lumber—but so far, no attempt to re-create those conditions has produced an instant Stradivari. According to Sacconi, the desired sound emerged in the building: he argued that one of Stradivari's great insights was to build unusually thin components for his instruments' backs, bellies, and ribs that could vibrate freely, rapidly, responsively. Stradivari's cello backs measure about seven and a half millimeters thick at the center, substantially thinner than more recent instruments. The critical decision to be made was the precise arching or curve outward to be used for both back and belly. Cello bellies and backs were made of two, sometimes more, pieces of wood, shaped and joined. Each piece would be cut into a slab of approximately the thickness of the thickest part of the component being made and then would be carved, first roughly and then with fine finish work, to the exact thickness and shape required. Stradivari's craft skills here showed themselves at their best: he was able to carve a solid piece of maple into a symmetrical arching with striking precision. That task is complex, as the shape of a cello, with a top portion, a narrow waist, and a bottom slightly wider than the top, means that that curve of the arching has to vary up and down the instrument to retain the desired thicknesses.

Once the components of a cello's resonating chamber were complete, Stradivari next cut the f-shaped holes, whose position he determined by considering the curve of the arching, the volume of the resonating chamber, the strength of the wood being used, and the position in which the bridge would be placed. Next he would add the bass bar to the belly of the instrument and then prepare to close the sound box, placing the sound post and gluing together the cello. Several steps remained—carving the inlaid outline, called purfling, that appears around the edges of the belly and back, carving the spiral scroll at the head of the neck of the instrument, building the neck and fingerboard, adding the pegs, and so on. But with the closing of

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the cello's body, Stradivari came to the end of the fundamental decisions that determined the acoustics of the instrument.

In sum, as Sacconi retraced Stradivari's style, the critical features that distinguished him from his contemporaries and his successors were the lightness of his constructions, the particular dimensions of his archings, and the experimentation with the volume of air to be enclosed by the instrument's body. Stradivari's evolving choices in each of these areas suggest not only that he knew geometry but that he understood a great deal of practical acoustics—and was especially sensitive to the relationships between the major variables that shaped the sound of his creations. Sacconi reported that Stradivari was prepared to shift the position of his f-holes each time he altered his belly archings, for example, and, more generally, he noted that every change Stradivari made in one of his molds rippled through all the dimensions of the instrument built on the reformed template. Even the decorative scrolls, Sacconi argued, revealed Stradivari's deep, systematic knowledge of his craft. Their form emerges from the intersection of two spirals: Archimedes' spiral shapes the inner coil of the scroll, while Vignola's forms the outline of the large curve around the back of the scroll. The resulting shape looks graceful and effortless; but, wrote Sacconi, one has to know the principle involved: "It cannot be done by eye or freehand."

This is where Sacconi's account opens the door for the analytical approach to Stradivari. Sacconi argued, in effect, that Stradivari had mastered his physics as a practical matter—and thus far the case rings true, for while one great instrument might be an accident, hundreds cannot be, which certainly suggests that Stradivari knew what he was doing. Given that, others who also know physics ought to be able to recapture the principles with which Stradivari worked. The main line of inquiry has been to look at the acoustical behavior of the disassembled components before they have been incorporated into a completed instrument. Instrument builders routinely tap the belly and back plates of cellos, violas, and violins that are under construction, listening to the pitch and clarity of the sound those plates make when struck. In the last twenty years, detailed, quantifiable analysis of both the motion of the tapped plates and of the tones that result has replaced the craftsman's knuckle and ear, and two categories of data have emerged.

First, a variety of imaging techniques has detailed a series of different patterns, or modes that occur on freestanding belly and back plates when they are struck with blows of varying intensity. Second, the pitches that sound have been analyzed to yield the basis of a theory of violin-family construction. The fundamental pitch of a back

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or belly changes with the shape of the plate. It is thus possible to "tune" a violin-family body by altering the thickness or arching of the plates. Stradivari's "secret," according to this kind of analysis, was the precise tuning he used on each plate to arrive at a perfectly balanced instrument. Several makers have tried to build Stradivari-like instruments by re-creating back and belly tunings observed on various Stradivari violins. More generally, Carleen Hutchins, a violin maker who has pioneered the mathematical analysis of violin acoustics, argues that an instrument builder can achieve the best results by tuning the top plate of a violin-family instrument vibrating in one pattern, the "x" mode, to a pitch one octave above the bottom plate, vibrating in another pattern, the "ring" mode.

Using this kind of method, Hutchins, collaborating with fellow violin researcher Frederick Saunders and others, began to examine the characteristics that would produce the "ideal" instrument—attempting, in effect, to leap past the accumulation of craft technique represented by Stradivari and the Cremonese masters, through the application of the first principles of acoustical physics. The group concentrated their studies on the scaling of members of the violin family, examining the acoustical relationships between the sizes of the bodies of the different instruments—violin, viola, cello, and their deep cousin, the double bass. The group noted, correctly, that the viola in particular had a body that was considerably smaller, relative to its range of pitches, than that of the violin. The cello, too, turned out to be cramped, given the notes it had to produce, though less so than the viola. To design a new family of violin-style instruments with more consistent resonating chambers, the group turned to one of the simplest rules in the physics of resonating bodies: the general law of similarity. That law states that if a resonator's linear dimensions increase by some number A, then the natural frequencies at which it vibrates decrease by the reciprocal number 1/A. The bigger the box, that is, the lower its fundamental note, the pitch decreasing in inverse proportion to the change in size. The law holds for simple resonators, like a freely vibrating flat plate, and is approximately correct for the more complicated shapes of the violin and its siblings.

With this scaling law in hand, the acoustical errors of traditional instrument design become obvious. A cello, for example, with its bottom note one-third the frequency of a violin's lowest string, ought to be three times as big as a violin in all its linear dimensions. Such an instrument would have to be about five feet, ten inches long, dwarfing a conventional cello, which measures only about four feet in overall length. An instrument that big would be extremely cumbersome to play, and a correctly scaled double bass would be even worse, but

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Hutchins and her colleagues did develop a family of eight violinlike instruments, covering the entire pitch range of orchestral music. They made a number of compromises to ease the use of their new designs, and their instruments did not scale precisely: the volume of their baritone instrument, tuned to the cello tuning, is less than three times the size of their violin equivalent. But by manipulating length, depth, and width, they did generate instruments that came closer to acoustically optimal dimensions than those of any previous makers, Stradivari included.

Several sets of these violinesque instruments now exist, and they do perform the task for which they were built: they are playable, and they produce sounds whose properties can be clearly related to their design. The violin in the new family, for example, is slightly larger than the traditional version, and it consistently produces louder sound—an average increase of three to four decibels—than does an ordinary violin. Because each of the instruments is scaled along consistent lines, the instruments possess a similarity of tone, which has created an ensemble sound that many audiences have found pleasing. In a recent demonstration of the characteristics of such instruments, Yo Yo Ma performed in Amsterdam using a Hutchins-designed alto violin, or vertical viola, for the Benjamin Britten concerto for viola. The Hutchins instrument actually looks like a viola on steroids—just a little larger in all dimensions than its conventional cousin. It is played cello style, perched on top of an extra-long end pin, and its tone possesses significantly more power than that of ordinary violas. In Ma's hands, the instrument produced a striking effect—an almost harsh, strident sound that seemed to leap out into the hall. In the context of Britten's score, that edge to the solo part worked beautifully.

But what is lost to purchase such punch is the subtlety of expression the great old instruments produced. Stradivari's work, like that of the other old masters, turned on the expressive range of his instruments—their ability to generate a wide variety of sounds, to be used by the skilled player to express a full palette of musical effects and emotional colors. The new instruments provide all the power and clarity one could desire, but compared with the old instruments they are monochromatic and dull.

Politely, this attempt to derive the perfect instrument from the laws of physics—an instance of the top-down approach that seeks to construct particular phenomena from a knowledge of the general rule—has not, in fact, supplanted the old Italian master's work as the ideal. More bluntly, as one distinguished Stradivari scholar and instrument builder put it, this kind of work demonstrates "the nonsense of

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the 'scientific approach.' " Nonetheless, it still leaves another strategy open. The bottom-up approach to the mystery of Stradivari begins with the particular instruments he built—and the simplest, most obvious first step toward re-creating their sound is to copy them as precisely as possible. Beginning around 1800, when Stradivari's instruments were first generally regarded as the best by Cremonese makers (and hence the best available), highly regarded violin makers began to emulate the particular Stradivari instruments that pleased them the most, producing virtually identical physical replicas of the old instruments. The best of these display excellent craftsmanship and fine appearance, but they all fail the fundamental test: they may look like the originals, but they do not sound like them.

The Hill brothers examined several of the highest-rated attempts of nineteenth-century imitators and dismissed them all—and their judgment holds, broadly, for more recent copies. The instruments they tested could be very close to the originals by all ordinary criteria: the instruments built by the Guadagnini and the Gagliano families were "constructed on the principles of Stradivari [and] the material used is in many cases acoustically equal." Despite that, noted the Hills, "they have by no means the same character of tone." They shouldered aside the French maker Lupot, saying of his work: "The tone is . . . of a stiff and veiled character." With a commendable lack of nationalist prejudice, they rejected the English builder Daniel Parker's long-strad copies, complaining of the "metallic character" of their sound.

Such criticism does have one flaw, though. All this talk of tone and color via the use of subjective adjectives like "veiled" or "metallic" is part of the mystique of old violins. But this kind of language also works to preserve a sense of esoteric, privileged knowledge that attends any story of ancient traditions and the decayed state of modern ideas, and it can be used to keep out people who have not been admitted to the mysteries. The actual situation is that the difference between modern instruments and old ones is readily accessible. Untrained ears hear it, and though the language that describes the sound is imprecise, qualitative differences between old instruments and new can be measured and quantified with ease. As machines—not magical implements—old violins behave in distinct ways that separate them from new ones. Studies of the frequency response of three types of violins—mass-produced modern instruments, new instruments made by master builders, and old Italian violins—yield snapshots of the kinds of sound each category produces. The factory-built instruments are thin and weak in the lower register, and their response steadily declines in the higher range. The handmade instruments perform strikingly differently. They have much more bass, and

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they reach peak response relatively low in their range, around the frequency of 1,000 hertz, or cycles, per second. They then maintain more or less that same sound output all the rest of the way up to their highest notes. The old violins display a much more varied curve. Their bass is marked by three distinct peaks, with valleys in between. They then ramp up to a peak much higher than do newer violins, around 2,500 hertz, before falling off in a sharp dive.

In other words, old violins display much more complicated acoustical behavior than do even well-made modern instruments—which confirms what the Hill brothers' sensitive ears already heard: that the older instruments possess a greater potential for varied expression than do newer ones. Two other bits of data fill in the picture of what the old masters accomplished. The peak response of the older violins falls within the most sensitive range of human hearing, and the location of that peak also bears a striking similarity to a peak region found in the frequency-response curves of trained operatic voices. It is often said, to return to the imprecision of metaphor, that instruments of the violin family "sing." By the evidence of precise acoustical analysis, the best of the old violins, violas, and cellos match the metaphor and recall that most emotionally expressive of musical instruments, the human voice.

Recognizing the complexity of the sound produced by the older instruments, though, merely defines the problem more sharply than before. The question remains: How did Stradivari and his contemporaries get that sound? The repeated disappointments of even the best copies of Stradivari suggest that the old masters had some critical knowledge, lost to modern builders, that made their instruments more than the sum of their (by now) exhaustively analyzed parts.

The search for that secret has come to rest on the final stage in violin-family construction. After Stradivari worked out the precise design of an instrument and assembled its components, he finished the instrument, protecting the naked wood with a coating of varnish. Stradivari was one of the last makers to use the old-style Cremonese finish, as the composition of instrument varnishes changed abruptly around 1750, soon after his death. No written version of the older recipe remains. Consequently, the Cremona varnish has become a creature of legend, the magic bullet that could transform any instrument (or maker) into a Stradivari. That legend must be at least partly true: the Cremonese varnish does affect the final sound quality of an instrument. Sacconi reported locating a Stradivari violin that had been revarnished with a modern finish. This finish made the instrument "unrecognizable both in its sound and its aesthetic characteristics." A varnish, any varnish, shapes the sound of an instrument by

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altering the flexibility of the wood. A thick, heavy finish damps vibrations, muffling the sound; one that is hard and rigid confers a metallic, harsh tone. Stradivari probably achieved the best results of any Italian maker, but all the old varnishes managed to reach a beautiful compromise. They conferred strength and rigidity to the wood of the resonating chamber, allowing the brightness of tone to show through, while dampening the vibrations just enough to keep the instrument from screeching and sounding shrill.

Yet the notion that the varnish was the one critical mystery of their trade would have come as news to those who used it. It was hardly treated as a rigorously protected trade secret, as were the techniques of porcelain making that the Chinese attempted to hide from European spies. While each maker might have had his own variation, the basic ingredients were common knowledge and were available on the open market. Records show that varnishes were mixed by assistants, not masters, which suggests that even individual recipes were hardly top secret. Jacob Stainer, the best German violin maker, never lived in Cremona, yet he possessed the "secret" of the Italian varnishes. We do not know what they used or how they used it, but they knew and apparently they saw nothing exceptional about the information.

For modern researchers, recognizing that the varnish recipes were common knowledge aided the search for what was apparently too familiar to be written down. Though the precise Stradivari technique has been lost, a number of researchers have isolated at least the basic composition of the old varnish and have reconstructed the methods of its use. The first critical piece of the puzzle was the discovery, made by Sacconi and others, that the Cremonese violin makers used a two-step finishing process, a method lifted from the work of furniture makers in the sixteenth century. (The job was the same for both crafts, after all: a violin, like a chest, is an assembly of wooden parts, on which the finish serves as a barrier between the easily marred raw wood and daily use and abuse.) The undervarnish was a kind of hardening glue that coated and strengthened the wood surface without clogging the microscopic pores of the material—properties that help to account for the "live," readily vibrating action of the resonating surfaces of Stradivari's instruments. Chemical analysis of wood taken from old instruments has revealed unusual amounts of silica and potash, which, when heated and then allowed to harden into a silicate of potassium and calcium, would form a glassy, hard surface.

Sacconi attempted a bit of experimental archaeology of his own to reconstruct this old glue. At his home on Long Island he grew his own grapevines, enabling him to imitate the old Italian process of extracting potash from the ashes of grape pressings or vine cuttings.

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Melted with silica and potash, dissolved in water and then boiled, the mixture yielded a clear fluid, which, when painted onto a wood surface and exposed to air, turned a golden yellow color. Again, imitating old craft methods, Sacconi would smooth the varnish using a piece of fish skin and a powder of goose grass. This gluey underlayer, like the Cremonese original from which it descended, created a hard, impermeable coat over the instrument, providing the ground for the application of the next layer, the colored varnish.

As was the case with the undercoat, the basic composition of this layer is also well known and has been for at least a century. The Hill brothers noted that "Stradivari used solely a pure oil varnish, the composition of which consisted of a gum soluble in oil, possessing good drying qualities, with the addition of coloring ingredients." The particular gums and oils were derived from naturally occurring substances: propolis, a resinous substance collected by the bees of Lombardy from poplar tree blossoms; turpentine extracted from the resin of larch trees; oil of spike lavender; ethyl alcohol; and others. Coloring agents included cinnabar (reddish-tinted mercuric sulfide, the most common ore of mercury) and red madder (a pigment extracted from the root of the plant *Rubia tinctorum*).

Finishing an instrument required several coats of this varnish, laid on with a brush or a sponge and then allowed to dry. The wait for each layer to dry could be tedious—in one of only two of his surviving letters, Stradivari explained the delay in delivery of an instrument because of the unusually slow pace of the drying process. The difficulty in applying the varnish at just the right thickness per layer and the impatience that grew, waiting for each coat to dry, probably accounted for the disappearance of the older oil-based varnishes. Beginning around 1750, spirit-based varnishes that formed a quick-drying hard shell became available. Vastly more convenient than the cumbersome traditional preparations, the new varnishes caught on, especially in the high-volume violin factories of Milan and Naples, despite the lack of depth and body they imparted to the tone of instruments. By the end of the eighteenth century, the remnant of those trained in the workshops of the best Cremonese makers—Stradivari's sons, his assistant, the last Guarneris—had all died, taking with them, apparently, the knowledge of the older technique.

Both the appearance and the tone of Stradivari's finished instruments certainly were the product, at least partially, of the particular qualities his varnish imparted. But if, as Sacconi's own work demonstrated, that varnish was less a secret formula and more a forgotten and mostly recoverable craft technique, then the fundamental mystery of the uniqueness of Stradivari's success remains. Sacconi himself

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was able to create a finish that displayed many of the properties identified with the Cremona varnishes. He also knew, as well as any other violin expert of his day, the exact measurements of Stradivari's instruments. He devoted much of his life to repairing and restoring the great instruments of the Cremonese masters—and he spent the rest of his time building his own, striving to recapture the unique, unmistakable sound of his beloved Stradivari. Yet he failed, just like his predecessors in the nineteenth century. He did build credible violins, some of which have captured highly respectable prices at rare-instrument auctions, but their measure can be found in the back-handed praise offered by Andrew Dipper, the instrument maker who wrote the preface to Sacconi's book: "Had Mr. Sacconi had the possibility of working within the . . . uninterrupted tradition [of Cremonese builders] his achievements may have totally surpassed the achievements of Stradivari." Because Sacconi did not have that chance, in other words, his work did not supplant the old master's—and, presumably, we should not have expected it to do so. And yet, again, why not? What is a cello; what is it in some cellos that eludes the power of scientific description, that escapes our reason and our capacity to create it on demand?

The answer, most simply, is that the cello, any cello, is more than the sum of its parts, a fact that the two chief approaches to the problem of Stradivari ignore. At their logical extreme both assume that there is a single, correct solution. The analytical approach—the top-down inquiry that begins from physical theory—assumes that there is an ideal range of acoustical behavior associated with a type of instrument. That perfect sound, in turn, sets the parameters for the design of the instrument perfectly suited to produce it. The bottom-up approach, combining the archaeological investigation of Stradivari's methods with an exact description of his finished instruments, makes the same mistake in a different way. Where the physicist can imagine a universally perfect cello, the archaeologist chooses a particularly wonderful instrument—but the outcome is the same: the imitator seeks to build toward the single, right answer, defined by whichever actual Stradivari cello he selects as his target.

Within the context of Newtonian science, such assumptions make sense: one of its fundamental tenets held that the behavior of any mechanical system can be characterized, whether in a general form or for each particular example of such a system. Up to a point, that belief holds true, but from it emerges another idea that is far less secure. Those who sought Stradivari's insight believed that understanding what he did, even how he did it, would lead directly to the ability to replicate—or, more generally, that the description of a sys-

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tem and its current behavior would produce the understanding needed to predict accurately the behavior of such systems in the future. The reality is far more complex and more limiting. The actual experience of constructing a cello points out the flaw, the almost invisible crack, in the foundation of this Newtonian worldview.

Peter and Wendy Moes are among the leading contemporary American makers of cellos, violins, and violas. Based in Connecticut, they have been building instruments for the better part of two decades. They work as a team, constructing two instruments at a time. They divide some of the tasks. Wendy always carves the scrolls, while Peter is responsible for the f-holes and the arching; but mostly they mix and match, doing what needs to be done. It takes them about four months to turn out a pair of cellos. They are slower than many makers, but their pace enables them to control as much as possible the character of the sound their instruments will produce. They have a target clearly in mind—not Stradivari's but their own. Peter describes his ideal cello as one with a lot of bass, a top (A) string that doesn't screech, good power throughout the full range of the instrument, and, most important, a complexity and a fullness to the sound so that it can resonate throughout a concert hall without booming. Wendy's metaphor for the tone quality she seeks is that of a circle. A bad cello will produce a note that traces a round outline. A good one will fill in the shape, shading it with texture and nuance.

Attempting to imitate the Italian masters seems to the Moeses not just a bad idea—it would be boring, Peter argues, to strive for someone else's sound rather than your own—but impossible. Efforts to recreate Stradivari's instruments must fail, according to Peter and Wendy Moes, because of a confusion between what a cello does and what it is. The chief conceptual mistake made in the analysis of a fine instrument is to treat the components that make up the instrument as discrete, individual parts—an error to be found in all the textbook descriptions of cello anatomy (including the one in this article). Rather, as it comes together, a cello accumulates into a single, functional whole, and the behavior of each of the distinct pieces must converge.

If such parts behaved the same way every time, the problem would evaporate. Find a design that works, stamp out the subassemblies (like fenders for Buicks), and bolt the whole lot together, one cello after another. But from the beginning, in the workshop, before a single piece of wood has been cut to size, the image of the cello as a machine plays false. From conception to completion, the process of constructing an instrument more closely mimics living behavior than the mechanical logic of the assembly line or the inflexible, descriptive

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rigor of physical analysis. It all begins with the wood, and the builder of an instrument must alter where she alteration finds: Wendy and Peter Moes in effect grow, rather than assemble, each cello, constructing each successive part of the instrument in response to the particular, individual characteristics of the bits already built.

Thus, for the Moeses, the first and most important decision to be made on each instrument is the selection of the individual pieces of lumber that must be persuaded to make beautiful music together. Their one "secret" lies in their insistence on using old wood. They seek out the finest material, board by board, through one of the smallest and most specialized timber markets in the world. The maple they use for the backs and ribs of their instruments is at best middle-aged—cut about 150 years ago. They get the best they can, seeking boards harvested from houses built in Italy or Switzerland that have natured toward the optimum combination of strength and flexibility. The spruce found in their instrument bellies is even more special. In 1978 their timber dealer found them a ceiling from a four-hundred-year-old house in the Swiss Alps, whose boards came from stands of spruce that probably served the master craftsmen in the rich Italian cities to the south. Those ceiling boards come from spruces that were harvested correctly, felled in December, when the sap has slowed and the wood is at its peak, hard and ready to work.

Finding a whole ceiling made of the right kind of wood was a stroke of luck for the Moeses' workshop; the harvest from other houses of similar age ensures their supply. At best, they are better off than Stradivari himself. He bought a particularly excellent and substantial log of maple in the Cremonese lumber mart early in the 1710s. That log lasted him until around 1720 and proved irreplaceable. Stradivari's violins and cellos from that decade boast the most beautiful backs of any of his instruments, with fine grain and the characteristic stripes of polished maple. After he had exhausted that one log he was never able to achieve that peak appearance again.

For Wendy and Peter Moes, the use of the recycled scraps of Renaissance Swiss farmhouses shapes each subsequent decision for each instrument. Even though the ceiling timbers available to them for the moment are from the same lot, each piece of timber differs from every other, and they find themselves cobbling together both backs and bellies out of several pieces of wood. So the first problem is to find lengths of spruce and maple that will, when glued together, function effectively as a single sounding board. A cello under construction in their shop at the time of this writing possessed a belly made of five different pieces of spruce, each with a different grain,

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with differing strengths both along and across those grains, showing three knots, one large, all of which had to work as a unit.

The process of putting together such a belly is one of ebb and flow. The Moes duo begins with a set design, a cello mold that they use, just like Stradivari and all of his rote imitators, to fix the basic dimensions of their instruments. But to build the five-piece belly sitting in their workshop, the couple had to carve each piece to the particular thicknesses (varying from plank to plank and within each segment). The precise choices depended on what seems like an instinct, a feel, but actually is knowledge acquired by long practice that gives them their sense of the acoustical consequences of each decision. The choices change with every instrument. The wood within the large knot on the lower left of the current belly was far harder and more rigid than the unblemished trunk wood around it, which would have set up a dead spot in the vibrations of the belly as a whole. So Peter carved that one small area down to almost paper thinness and backed up the knot with a hidden spruce patch, glued to the inside of the instrument. A particularly wide-grain slat may need to be slightly thicker than the narrow-grain strip to which it is joined. If one belly seems a little more flexible, fully assembled, than the other of the two cellos being built at one time, the arching of backs and fronts may have to differ.

Each cello Wendy and Peter Moes build differs from every other to a greater or lesser degree, just as Stradivari's did; and it is here that the metaphor of growth applies. The plan for a cello corresponds to its genetic code; the specifications guarantee that what will emerge will be a cello, not a viol or some hideous giant mutant ukulele. But as the instrument makes its way from plan to completion, it responds to the particular conditions that shape its unique configuration of wood and glue. The instrument to which Peter applied another coat of varnish as he told its story was a member of the species cello by its nature. In its nurturing at his and Wendy's hands, it gained its distinctive qualities as a fine cello, one with its own voice.

Just as it is impossible, peering at an infant in its crib (or for that matter, at a seedling poking through the forest floor), to predict how a child (or a tree) will turn out, so the Moes pair cannot anticipate exactly what they will need to do to produce each of their instruments. They know, along with every master instrument maker before them, that nothing will permit them to replicate a given instrument exactly—not one of Stradivari's, not one of their own. On the most obvious level, the variability of wood makes the difference. This vexing inconstancy defeats the strategy of precision measurement: the exact figures for the dimensions of a given cello will produce the

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performance characteristics of that cello only if the imitator can find wood that will behave precisely as the original timber does. This does not occur; no two slices, even from the same log, share identical properties.

And the way each piece of wood, each carefully shaped component, differs from the next also undermines those trying to copy Stradivari using analytical methods—those attempts to isolate the physics of the Stradivari sound in some "secret" acoustical property of one aspect or another of his design. The point of such investigations is to gain the ability to predict how any proposed cello design will behave, allowing the scientific instrument builder to direct his efforts to generate a specific result. Such predictions are made by taking the information available at one time and using the apparatus developed out of Newton's laws of motion to forecast a system's behavior indefinitely into the future. The failure of this approach in this instance points to one of three conclusions: the investigators have been inept; Newton's laws and the rest of mechanical physics are wrong; or there is a property inherent in cellos that renders predictions about their behavior unreliable. The first two possibilities hold out some hope, but the third option is correct: the Moeses' inability to make two cellos the same derives from a fundamental principle in nature and not simply from the imprecision of human craft.

This is so because cellos belong to a class of phenomena, ubiquitous in nature, called nonlinear systems; their behavior cannot be predicted precisely in the conventional sense. Newton's equations do give reliable accounts of such critical processes as the motion of the solar system. We know where Jupiter will be, to a high level of precision, for thousands of years to come. Newton's laws of motion work perfectly to analyze and predict what are called linear systems, where one unit of energy, for example, makes a ball roll at one unit of speed, while twice as much energy produces twice the velocity.

But if forecasting the future of linear, or nearly linear, systems poses little difficulty—just figure out how much energy is going in and crank out the number for how fast an object will travel or where it will be at any time down the line—nonlinear systems do not behave so neatly. Every component of a cello—back, belly, ribs, sound post, varnish, and the rest—reacts differently when agitated by different amounts of energy. Being hit twice as hard does not necessarily make a belly vibrate twice as fast. The relationship between input and output, energy in and sound out, for each component follows its own nonlinear course. What this means is that a small change in the input of energy to a component can trigger a major change in what the component does, how it vibrates, where it distributes that energy

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across a back plate, and so on. This property, known as the "sensitive dependence on initial conditions," is what makes prediction such a problem.

What makes it worse, so far as the cello goes, is that the instrument's nonlinear elements work together, making a far more complex nonlinear whole. The interactions between the components produce rapid, continuous variation in the transmission of energy among all the moving parts of the instrument. If a little alteration can produce a big difference in sound, then in order to predict what sounds will emerge from a given cello one would need to know exactly what all those nonlinear components will do in any given circumstance in response to any stroke of a bow. That does not on the face of it seem impossible: it is, after all, simply an issue of precision measurement, a task that we can do very well. Find out the material properties of each piece of wood used, measure their vibrations under different stimuli, and then grind out the calculations (which is what Hutchins and her collaborators have done with their new violin family, more or less). But, in fact, such measurements do not produce Stradivaris. Some things, it turns out, are unmeasurable. The sensitive dependence on initial conditions that characterizes a cello's nonlinear performance means that even very slight differences between the observed, measured value and the actual one out there in the body of the cello can throw off the results in a direction that cannot be anticipated. Because all measurements are only as exact as the tool used to make them, errors are inevitable, and those errors have, so far, been enough to prevent anyone from imitating Stradivari.

In current jargon, this falls into the area known as chaos. The term is misleading, for the physicists' chaos possesses a great deal of order and recoverable information, quite at odds with the chaos of Genesis, random, formless, and unmapped. The experience of instrument makers suggests the kind of knowledge accessible in this realm of scientific chaos. Even though Peter and Wendy Moes cannot anticipate exactly what shape the cello they are about to build will take, or precisely how it will sound, they still understand a great deal. They do know broadly how the kinds of cellos they make will perform. And with the intuition they have honed through years of experience, they know how to blend the mixture of all their physically complicated components to produce a cello that will fall into the range of performance they desire. Theirs is the practical version of the kind of prediction or anticipation that the mathematics of nonlinear systems makes possible. Instead of the exact predictions available for linear problems, one can analyze the types of events that can occur within a given nonlinear system—what kinds of cellos can be built and what

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factors can constrain the range of options—to close in on a particularly Moes-sounding cello.

The existence of nonlinearity in a system produces a tension, a kind of balance. All of Newton's laws still govern the system. Its behavior is thus intelligible, restricted, predictable up to a point: a cello is never going to sound like a ukulele; a Moes cello will not mimic one of Stradivari's. Against this knowledge, the sensitivity of many nonlinear systems to the tiniest gusts and buffets produces an unpredictability that can be seen as flexibility, a sense of possibility. The nonlinearity of its response is what distinguishes the sound of a good cello, producing what Wendy Moes imagined as a filled-in circle of sound, rich and expressive. Stradivari's instruments possess this quality of complexity, of personality, in the highest degree. And at the same time, instruments built in the course of a seventy-year career still sound recognizably similar, made by the same hand, which means that, as a practical matter, even if he did not do the math, Stradivari understood how to build toward the kind of results he sought. But the elusiveness of those results suggests that Stradivari's cellos produce their music out of the extraordinarily complex interplay of all the nonlinear elements from which the finished instruments were composed. The "secret" of his sound lies not with any one feature but with his ability to marry the lot of them together with a subtlety and precision that cannot be isolated. Someone could yet re-create Stradivari's effects, given time, trial, craftsmanship, and luck. But the inherent unpredictability that permeates the task of building a first-class cello means that the hunt for the law, for the list of rules for building a Stradivari, cannot succeed.

Between the years 1717 and 1723, Bach enjoyed a kind of holiday, serving as *Kapellmeister*, or music master, in the court of Prince Leopold, ruler of the tiny German principality of Anhalt-Cöthen. In a peculiar way, it was Bach's good fortune that Anhalt-Cöthen prayed in reformed churches, a sect that took its religion straight, with far less musical accompaniment than most denominations. There was thus little demand for sacred music—and the princedom had few professionally trained singers able to perform at the standards required. Bach himself was a devout Lutheran; he composed his cantatas, his Passions, and the rest as a joyful gift to God. But in Leopold's capital city of Cöthen, he enjoyed a respite from the incredible labor of feeding music week after week into the church calendar. Thus liberated, Bach produced one of his most sustained outpourings of secular, instrumental compositions, an astounding body of work that includes some of the monuments of his career.

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The Brandenburg Concertos come from this period, as do some of his greatest keyboard works (except for his organ music). Bach wrote for the violin, flute, and viol da gamba; he produced compositions for two instruments, for trios—responding to the appetite of a sovereign eager to listen and to play. But of all the music he made in those six years, perhaps the most remarkable was the handful of pieces he wrote for an instrument just beginning to make its presence felt, the six suites for solo cello, composed in 1720.

The cello suites are unique. Solo cello music existed before Bach, but taken together as a body of pieces, nothing like them had been written before Bach; nothing like them has been written since. There was a gamba player in Leopold's orchestra who doubled as a cellist, so the works were probably performed in Cöthen around the time they were written. But they mostly dropped out of sight after that. They were used as teaching pieces, and cellists would play a single movement or perhaps as much as one of the suites during a recital; but Pablo Casals was the first since Bach's lifetime to have treated the six pieces as a unified body of work, performing the whole group as part of his concert repertoire. With Casals's enthusiastic proseletyzing, the suites began to represent to cellists what the role of Hamlet does for actors: pieces they had to master to lay claim to the first rank of their profession.

Of contemporary soloists, none has a deeper involvement with the suites than Yo Yo Ma. He performed one of them in public when he was seven years old, and he has returned to them again and again. In a landmark performance in 1992, Ma played all six—more than two hours of music—in a single concert at Carnegie Hall. (The Dutch cellist Anner Bylsma is the other contemporary soloist who has repeatedly performed all six suites together.) Ma used his Stradivari, the Davidov, which met the need: the sound from that cello filled the enormous cavern of Carnegie Hall, carrying even when Ma sought to whisper the notes off its strings, conveying every shade of tone and color he imparted to the music. The cumulative effect of the six suites, layered one atop the next, was as if Ma laid out a map of emotion and ideas, and then explored it in ever greater detail, until his audience could recognize the full, rich, intricate range of feeling that Bach had imparted to his score.

For Ma, the suites (and music in general) "are about the primary things we have to deal with, what we know and the terror and mystery of what we don't: the terror and mystery of death." Each of the suites conveys a particular story to him. The fifth, his favorite, tells of "resignation, loss—with a certain hope as well—but definitely loss." Expressing what he finds in the score that Bach left him requires a

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balancing act. On one hand, Ma pays extremely close attention to the elaborate structure of the pieces: "You have to have an organized mind," he says. "If you go for beautiful sound and gorgeous melodies but ignore the rhythmic and harmonic pillars; if you are not constantly listening to the bass line; if you're not aware of the dance beat; if you don't recognize the multiple patterns that sometimes go with and sometimes interfere with strong beats—then you can't extract the joy from the music. You don't get the feeling of large structure; you can't do it, it just doesn't happen." But on the other hand, too precise a reading and the joy gets lost again. "Perfection means you hit every note, no scratches, playing totally reliably. But that squeezes the life out; it destroys a piece of music. The element of risk isn't there. In performance you shape, mold, and sculpt. You follow whatever you can sense of the motion, the wave, the physicality of a smooth stream of notes. You have to build the piece with your fingers, mind, instrument. It has to breathe. Perfection to me is static."

It is here that the experience of the music touches the issues with which modern science has been grappling for a hundred years and more. What Bach wrote is fixed, determined, unchanging—and untouchable by the audience. But then Ma, reading the score and transforming that text into a river of sound, stood between us and Bach. Instead of Bach's voice, we heard Ma's translation of a text into music, into an experience available to a listener. And each member of the audience in some sense chose a particular version of the suites heard that night, encountering the music Ma made from individual distinct vantage points. The sense Ma's remarkable performance gave of revealing all there was to be found in Bach's writing was actually a persuasive illusion; we heard what Ma found that night with ears tuned by our own concerns. The loss Ma felt in Suite no. 5 seemed to this listener more like resignation, mixed with anger. Either view will do, both can be located within what Bach composed.

For Bach's suites, read nature—the unchanging raw material of experience, the world out there, inaccessible to direct encounters. Ma and his cello become the instruments that create one image, a reflection of what can be glimpsed on a page of the book of nature. And finally, we—anyone who encounters each rendition of the music—find ourselves in the position of a researcher, an investigator, a scientist late in the twentieth century, studying each such image to try to locate ourselves within that created world of sound.

At any given performance we cannot locate all of Bach, find all the meaning, sound, sense, and feeling that may be contained within that score. We can always return and hear more, hear further into what we already have heard once—but we will never hear it all. That is our loss,

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inevitably. But with each foray Ma makes into what Bach wrote, each of his readings that we hear and interpret, we gain some new hint of what might exist within that immutable text. Compared with the hope of perfect knowledge that our predecessors nourished, the uncertainty that marks the twentieth century seems a retreat. Yet one more encounter with the Bach cello suites points toward the reward that compensates for that defeat. Perfection is static, as Ma says, dull—in music and in science as well. In place of perfection we find "the terror and mystery" of what we do not know, of possibility, and risk.

Ralph Ellison

1914–1994

Member, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR *Editorial Board*

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The Bulldog and the Butterfly

The Friendship of Edmund Wilson and Vladimir Nabokov

JEFFREY MEYERS

> Your letter is very clever, but still you are wrong, still you regard *Onegin* from the wrong point of view.
> —Pushkin to a friend, March 24, 1825

THE DISPUTE BETWEEN Edmund Wilson and Vladimir Nabokov in 1965 recalls a time, not long ago, when rival views of a literary critic and a prominent novelist about a translation of a nineteenth-century Russian poet made the news and for months occupied the pages of leading literary journals in America and England. Wilson's harsh review of Nabokov's four-volume edition of Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, published in the *New York Review of Books* in July 1965, destroyed his friendship with Nabokov—a friendship that had lasted, through minor storms, since Nabokov first arrived in the United States in 1940. An acrimonious correspondence took place between the two in the *New York Review of Books*, and in February 1966 Nabokov published in *Encounter* his "Reply to My Critics," which responded to all the attacks, including Wilson's, on his translation and commentary. Wilson later reopened the wound with an account of his visit to Nabokov in *Upstate* (1971) and a critique of his novels in *A Window on Russia* (1972). Nabokov retaliated with a ferocious letter in the *New York Times Book Review* of November 1971, which concluded the most notorious literary quarrel of the century.

Despite their rich friendship, Wilson and Nabokov always had radical intellectual differences, which fueled their protracted quarrel. But the dispute also had a deeply personal element and, to be fully under-

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stood, must be placed in its biographical context. In this conflict, a critic with a socio-historical bias opposed a modernist writer. But it also became a literary duel, fought on various points of honor, between the patrician American critic who had great power and influence in the Anglo-American literary world and the uprooted, dispossessed Russian novelist who had established a considerable reputation with his magical English prose.

Wilson and Nabokov—like two bishops speaking ex cathedra—each had a strong didactic streak, a stubborn tenacity of opinion, a fierce pride, and a grand manner that rejected challenges and contradictions. Despite differences in their literary and political ideas, they were intellectual equals and sympathetic soul mates. With Nabokov, Wilson abandoned his characteristic aloofness, courted his friend, and frequently invited him for stimulating visits to Stamford, Manhattan, Cambridge, Wellfleet, and Talcottville in upstate New York. Nabokov, chafing under, yet grateful for, Wilson's valuable patronage, responded with wary warmth and affection.

Yet the seeds of their bitter quarrel were, in retrospect, germinating from the start. Though they despised narrow-minded academics, both men were exceptionally pedantic and hairsplitting in their disputes about the fine points of Russian language and prosody. Nabokov, as touchy as a samurai, patiently endured Wilson's all-too-frank criticism of his work. But by 1965, when Nabokov's novels in English had established him as a major figure in American culture, he was no longer willing to tolerate Wilson's condescending and sometimes ill-informed remarks.

Accustomed to the potshots of their private war, Wilson was not fully aware of his own destructive impulse. An experienced journalistic warrior, he did not realize how deeply wounded Nabokov would be by the public betrayal of their long-standing comradeship. Though Wilson tried to apologize for his attack and did not respond to the harsh invective of Nabokov's parting salvo, the damage had been done, and both suffered a tragic loss of friendship.

The backgrounds and personalities of the two antagonists—bulldog and butterfly—were as important in their quarrel as the issues and ideas. The evaluations by Russian specialists of Nabokov's translation of and commentary on *Eugene Onegin* are extremely useful but, like the serious reviews of *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters*, do not consider the quarrel with Wilson. The biographical essays and books on Nabokov discuss the dispute from his perspective, do not fully recognize Wilson's point of view, and tend to simplify the complex motives of the combatants. Simon Karlinsky's valuable introduction to his edition of *The Nabokov-Wilson Letters* gives an objective rather than

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analytical account of their friendship. Andrew Field, Nabokov's first biographer, offers a rather superficial view. Even Brian Boyd, in his excellent life of Nabokov, reduces Wilson's motive to simple envy. The substantial essays by Robert Nelson in the *Georgia Review* and Janet Groth in her book on Wilson consider the polemics from a purely intellectual and ideological viewpoint. And Gennady Barabtarlo, who examined the material on Nabokov in the Wilson archive at Yale, has not found new evidence about the reasons for the quarrel.

The few critics who tried to explore the deeper motives seem to have missed the mark. To the gentle Victor Pritchett, who underestimates the seriousness of the quarrel, the row "seems more and more like a fireworks display than an attempt to draw blood." The perceptive Leon Edel calls it the product of a "protracted love-hate relationship," though there was no real hate and a great deal of sadness. Brian Boyd, who emphasizes the element of jealousy, exaggerates the comparative failure of Wilson's so-called "pornographic" fiction: "The eroticism of Wilson's *Memoirs of Hecate County* [1946] had ensured only that the book was banned from sale and forgotten. When *Lolita* [1955], on the other hand, brought Nabokov fortune, fame, and ringing acclaim, it sharply intensified Wilson's irritation that he could not quite compete and that Nabokov knew it." In fact, Wilson earned the enormous sum of $60,000 from *Memoirs of Hecate County*. Though the book was suppressed on the grounds of obscenity in 1946, it was not forgotten. Reissued, after the trial of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, by L. C. Page and by W. H. Allen in 1959, it was reprinted in American paperback editions by Signet, Noonday, and Ballantine. The Panther paperback edition, published in England, lists eight impressions between 1951 and 1960, and the book is still in print.

The critic and the novelist were both aging and irritable egoists when the quarrel went public. But the real reasons for Wilson's attack on Nabokov's edition, which Nabokov considered "far too sad and private to be aired in print," and for Nabokov's enraged response to Wilson's account of his visit to Ithaca, described in *Upstate*, have never been explained.

II

Simon Karlinsky mentions the similarities between the two men: "They came from cultivated upper-class homes within their respective cultures. Each had an interest and an involvement in the other's literature and native traditions. Both were at home in French literature and language. Both had a skeptical, albeit divergent, view of religion and mysticism. Both were sons of jurists who were involved in

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politics." He could have added that Nabokov's father might have become the Russian minister of justice if the short-lived democratic government had not been destroyed by the Bolsheviks in 1917, and that Wilson's father would have been on the American Supreme Court if there had been another vacancy after Woodrow Wilson appointed Louis Brandeis in 1916.

Edmund Wilson's passionate interest in Russian politics and literature began in the early years of the Depression. He learned Russian before his disillusioning trip to the Soviet Union in 1935, which he described in the misleadingly titled *Travels in Two Democracies* (1936). He wrote his first major essay on Russian literature, "In Honor of Pushkin," that year and included it in *The Triple Thinkers* (1938). Americans knew very little about most Russian writers until after World War II. Wilson's pioneering studies reached a wide audience and "put Pushkin and Gogol on the map" in this country.

Nabokov brought to his friendship with Wilson a rare combination of qualities. Handsome, athletic and witty, sophisticated, cosmopolitan and multi-lingual, he had a charming personality and a brilliant mind. A wide-ranging man of letters with catholic interests in science and art, Nabokov was also a great novelist whom Wilson could respect and assist. Nabokov arrived in America, after two decades in exile, in May 1940 and soon replaced Scott Fitzgerald—who died the following December—in Wilson's emotional and intellectual life. Wilson helped Nabokov establish himself at the beginning of his American career at the same time that he was reviving Fitzgerald's posthumous reputation by editing *The Last Tycoon* (1941) and *The Crack-Up* (1945). But when the pupil no longer needed the lesson of the master, and the talented beneficiary surpassed his former teacher, Nabokov—like Fitzgerald before him—aroused Wilson's jealousy and became his rival and adversary. In 1965 Wilson repeated the pattern he had formed with his Princeton disciple, turned against Nabokov, and quarreled with him as he had done with Fitzgerald.

At the suggestion of his cousin, the composer Nicholas Nabokov, Vladimir first wrote to Wilson on August 30, 1940. Wilson, then literary editor of the *New Republic*, responded with generous help. During the next few years Wilson used his valuable contacts to commission reviews from Nabokov for the *New Republic* and to place his work in the *Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*. He tried to get Nabokov teaching jobs at Bennington, Yale, and Princeton (while he himself was turned down for a position at Cornell); wrote him recommendations for a Guggenheim Fellowship, including one for an edition of *Eugene Onegin*. He introduced Nabokov to editors at New Directions and Doubleday, and advised him about getting the most favorable

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terms for his books. Wilson also read and made useful suggestions about Nabokov's manuscripts in English; and he wrote a blurb for *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941). He thought the novel "absolutely enchanting" and compared it to Proust, Kafka, and Gogol. He found a potential translator, Helen Muchnic, for Nabokov's Russian novels and loyally promoted these books, though he did not personally like them. Poor himself, he nevertheless offered to lend Nabokov money (which was politely refused).

Despite their formality and reserve, their friendship, during the course of many visits, flourished and deepened. Within eight months Nabokov was addressing Wilson as "Bunny" (a nickname used only by his oldest friends), and he was calling Nabokov "Vladimir," and then the even more familiar "Volodya." On November 4, 1940, a week before his first surviving letter to Nabokov, Wilson, corresponding with his old teacher and close friend, Christian Gauss, mentioned Nabokov's English education and stylish book reviews, artistic reputation and political beliefs:

> His English is perfect (he went to Cambridge, England)—I'm amazed at the excellence of the book reviews he's been doing for me. He is a brilliant fellow and considered by the Russians the most important talent among the émigrés. . . . His point of view is neither White Russian nor Communist. The family were land-owning liberals, and intellectually the top of their class. His father was a prominent leader of the Kadets. Vladimir is in pretty bad straits.

Significantly Wilson at first grasped Nabokov's political position and then, during their subsequent arguments about Communism, forgot what he had once known. Tremendously impressed by his new friend, Wilson also told the Houghton Mifflin editor Robert Linscott that Nabokov was "the most brilliant man he had ever met."

When they first met, Wilson was married to Mary McCarthy, who recalled their exhilarating conversations and the depth of emotion in what soon became the most important friendship in Wilson's life: "Edmund was always in a state of *joy* when Vladimir appeared; he *loved* him." Nabokov's visit to the Wilsons in Stamford, Connecticut, on June 6, 1942, inspired Nabokov's witty poem "The Refrigerator Awakes." This visit also involved some cagey fencing and Beckett-like incongruities. Wilson asked Nabokov if he believed in God. When Nabokov countered with "Do you?" Wilson muttered: "What a strange question!" When Wilson's marriage broke up two years later, after he beat McCarthy during a drunken quarrel and she fled to New York, his resident cook, afraid she would be named co-respondent in the divorce case, threatened to leave. Wilson turned to the Nabokovs at this desperate moment, and they moved into his house—

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before the cook moved out—for a transitional week in 1944.

The following March, shortly after the death of John Peale Bishop, another college friend, Wilson, who found it difficult to express his deepest feelings, told Nabokov: "Our conversations have been among the few consolations of my literary life through these last years—when my old friends have been dying, petering out or getting more and more neurotic." Nabokov responded warmly. In the 1940s he told Wilson: "I simply must see you both. I miss you a lot. . . . You are one of the very few people in the world whom I keenly miss when I do not see them." He later told Andrew Field that Wilson was a very old friend, "in certain ways my closest."

Wilson's first review of Nabokov's work was a favorable notice of his eccentrically perceptive study *Nicolai Gogol.* It appeared in *The New Yorker* on September 9, 1944. Though Wilson was "annoyed by the frequent self-indulgence of the author in poses, perversities and vanities," an annoyance that would intensify as Nabokov continued this habit, he praised the book and said it "takes its place with the very small body of first-rate criticism of Russian literature in English."

In November 1947 Wilson used his authority to protect Nabokov from an officious *New Yorker* editor who wanted to change the idiosyncratic style of his stories. "I have read the Nabokov stories," Wilson imperiously told Katharine White, "and I think they are both perfect. Not a word should be changed." That same year, as Nabokov later wrote in his introduction to the *Time* paperback edition of *Bend Sinister,* Wilson read the typescript of the novel and recommended the book to Allen Tate, then an editor at Holt, who published it in 1947. The proud Nabokov, who did not find it easy to express his gratitude, freely acknowledged his enormous debt to Wilson throughout his life. In March 1943, for example, he gratefully told Wilson: "I have noticed that whenever you are involved in any of my affairs they are always successful."

Their passionate common interest in Russian literature led Wilson, in November 1943, to suggest that they collaborate on a "Siamese" book in which Wilson would write the critical essays and Nabokov do the translations. Though they signed a contract with Doubleday (which Nabokov called "Dayday") for this joint project in 1944 and received an advance of $750 each, the book was never completed. "The only time I ever collaborated with any writer," Nabokov told Herbert Gold in his *Paris Review* interview, "was when I translated with Edmund Wilson Pushkin's [short verse play] *Mozart and Salieri* for the *New Republic* twenty-five years ago [in April 1941], a rather paradoxical recollection in view of his making such a fool of himself last year, when he had the audacity of questioning my understanding of *Eugene Onegin.*"

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In September 1948, Wilson revived the idea of a collaboration and helped to inaugurate Nabokov's edition by suggesting that they work together on a prose translation, with scholarly notes, of *Eugene Onegin.* Yet when Nabokov took up this idea on his own, and devoted more than a decade to this project, Wilson admonished him for spending so much time on *Eugene Onegin* instead of writing his own novels. Fitzgerald had given Wilson a similar warning in August 1919, just after completing *This Side of Paradise,* when he told him: "For God's sake, Bunny, write a novel and don't waste your time editing collections [of war stories]. It'll get to be a habit."

III

Though Wilson and Nabokov were intimate friends who admired and respected each other, their friendship was not based on similar views about life and art. Throughout the years they argued, in person and by mail, gently and harshly, about punning, pronunciation, approaches to literature, taste in authors, pornography, the meaning and value of Nabokov's works, and Russian politics. They also fought about two issues that would recur in their quarrel about Pushkin: the fine points of English and Russian versification and Pushkin's knowledge of English. Commenting, in his capacity as editor, on Nabokov's first *New Republic* review, Wilson advised him, in his very first letter, to give up his lamentable propensity to pun. Twelve years later the incorrigible Nabokov was still referring to Pushkin's poem as "You gin? One gin." Much later in their friendship, Wilson ticked off Nabokov about the correct way to pronounce "nihilist" in English and about the correct meaning of the French *faux ami, fastidieux.*

Their different—indeed, antithetical—approaches to literature were a more serious problem. In his diary of 1956, as well as in his essay on Nabokov in *A Window on Russia,* Wilson compared Nabokov's involuted novels to an outmoded decorative object of the Czarist era. He condemned the fabulous artificer's idea of a literary work as "something in the nature of a Fabergé Easter egg or other elaborate knickknack." The historically minded Wilson, who emphasized the author's biography and milieu rather than his style and technique, condescendingly asked Nabokov how he could "pretend that it is possible to write about human beings and leave out of account all question of society and environment." He concluded that Nabokov mindlessly "took over in your youth the *fin de siècle Art for Art's sake* slogan and have never thought it out."

Nabokov, carefully replying to his "fellow magician," argued, on the contrary, that "a critic's duty should be to draw [the reader's]

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attention to the specific detail, to the unique image, without . . . which there can be no art, no genius." In his commentary on *Eugene Onegin*, he hit directly at Wilson's influential approach by regretting that Pushkin "is treated by Russian pedants as a sociological and historical phenomenon typical of Alexander I's regime (alas, this tendency to generalize and vulgarize the unique fancy of an individual genius has also its advocates in the United States)." And in 1959, six years before their dispute exploded in public, Nabokov asked his editor not to seek an endorsement of his novels from Wilson, whose "symbolico-social criticism and phony erudition in regard to *Doctor Zhivago*" inspired his "utter disgust."

Their letters became bitter and even insulting when the two intensely contentious, competitive, and dogmatic friends disagreed about the merits of both classic and contemporary authors. Wilson would enthusiastically recommend his favorite authors, and Nabokov—who had an exalted idea of his own work and loved to demolish the reputations of great writers—would attack them and condemn Wilson's crude taste. When Wilson called Malraux "the greatest contemporary writer," the bristling Nabokov (who probably thought he himself was the greatest) asked if Wilson was kidding, and called *Days of Wrath* and *Man's Fate* a "solid mass of clichés." When Wilson praised Faulkner's genius, Nabokov found it incredible that he took Faulkner seriously and dismissed *Light in August* as "trite and tedious." Wilson, however, disliked Stevenson and Kafka, whom Nabokov admired. "You and I differ completely," he told Wilson, "not only about Malraux [Pasternak, and James], but also about Dostoyevsky, Greek drama, Lenin, Freud, and a lot of other things—about which, I'm sure, we'll never be reconciled." Wilson finally persuaded Nabokov to include Jane Austen and Dickens in his course on the novel at Cornell. And they did manage to agree about a few immortals: Pushkin, Flaubert, Proust, and Joyce.

Both men had a taste for "indecent" literature, from *The Story of O.* to Jean Genet; and Wilson once suggested an obscene, Genet-like interpretation of the title of one of his books: *The Bit Between My Teeth.* Wilson's *Memoirs of Hecate County* and Nabokov's *Lolita* were considered pornographic and ran into trouble with contemporary censorship, but both authors were critical of each other's work in that genre. Wilson complained to the poet Louise Bogan that Nabokov, ignoring the serious intent of his book, thought he had tried to imitate the pornography of John Cleland's eighteenth-century novel *Fanny Hill.* And Nabokov, using a masochistic image, tactlessly told Wilson that his book had failed to arouse erotic interest: I "derive no kick from the hero's love-making. I should have as soon tried to open a sardine

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can with my penis. The result is remarkably chaste, despite its frankness." Eight years later Wilson gave an imperceptive and similarly cutting response to *Lolita* (which both Mary McCarthy and his fourth wife, Elena, admired much more than he did): "I like it less than anything else of yours I have read. . . . Nasty subjects may make fine books; but I don't feel you have got away with this."

Their political disagreements were intensely personal and bitterly contested. "In historical and political matters," Nabokov told Wilson, stressing Wilson's ideological rigidity, "you are partisan of a certain interpretation which you regard as absolute. This means that we will have many a pleasant tussle and that neither will ever yield a thumb (inch) of *terrain* (ground)." Wilson had first recognized (in his letter to Christian Gauss) and then forgotten (when he dug in his heels against Nabokov) that the *intellectual* tradition in Russia, with few exceptions like Gogol and Dostoyevsky, was always liberal; and that an important democratic tradition—which Nabokov's father had belonged to and died for when he was assassinated in Berlin in 1922—stood between the Czarists and the Communists. Wilson, strongly influenced by the Marxist doctrines that swept America in the 1930s, tended to see Nabokov as a reactionary White Russian monarchist. "Your conception of Russian history is all wrong," he told Wilson, with his usual bluntness, "being based on the stale Bolshevist propaganda which you imbibed in your youth. . . . [You have] a complete ignorance of the . . . liberal movement that started in the time of Alexander I," who reigned from 1801 to 1825.

Despite these severe strictures, Wilson naïvely sent Nabokov a copy of *To the Finland Station* (1940), his massive study of the intellectual and political movements that led to the Russian Revolution. Though the book (in Nabokov's view) was fatally based on Communist sources, and portrayed Lenin as a warmhearted humanitarian and freedom-loving democrat, Wilson inscribed it "to Vladimir Nabokov in the hope that this may make him think better of Lenin." In 1971 Wilson finally recanted his views and admitted (indirectly) that Nabokov had been right about Lenin. Alluding to Nabokov as well as to other critics, Wilson wrote in the new introduction to a reprint of his book: "I have been charged with having given a much too amiable picture of Lenin, and I believe that this criticism has been made not without some justification." He also confessed: "I had no premonition that the Soviet Union was to become one of the most hideous tyrannies that the world had ever known."

Provoking, stimulating, offending, and even outraging each other was an essential element in the Wilson-Nabokov friendship, which survived for twenty-five years despite their profound disagreements.

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"We have always been frank with each other," Nabokov told him, "and I know that you will find my criticism exhilarating." After the extraordinary success of *Lolita* enabled Nabokov to give up teaching at Cornell and move to a suite in the Montreux Palace Hotel, Edmund and Elena Wilson visited him in Switzerland. In January 1964 they exchanged friendly luncheons and dinners and met for the last time. But Nabokov felt betrayed and wounded when he discovered that Wilson had written, but did not mention, the attack on his edition of *Eugene Onegin.*

IV

The *Eugene Onegin* controversy began with a preliminary skirmish between Nabokov and Walter Arndt, who published a verse translation of Pushkin's poem in 1963. Like Nabokov, Arndt was an ardent anti-Fascist and cosmopolitan exile, who became an academic in America. But these similarities did not save him from a savage review by Nabokov in the *New York Review of Books* of April 30, 1964. Announcing his own long-gestated and soon-to-be-published translation, Nabokov mercilessly flayed the verbal gobbets of the "pitiless and irresponsible paraphrast," who had just won the Bollingen Prize for translation. He attacked Arndt's anachronisms, absurd scansion, burlesque rhymes, crippled clichés, vulgarisms, howlers, lamentable Russian, and wobbly English.

After the assault on Arndt's workmanlike translation, Nabokov was under considerable pressure to produce a superior work of his own. But his word-for-word prose translation of 1964 was generally condemned as a misconceived failure. And most critics felt the elaborate commentary in his great Gothic cathedral of an edition (complete with rose windows and gargoyles) was seriously compromised by Nabokov's eccentricities and vendettas, and by his venomous criticism of innocent predecessors.

The root of the problem was Nabokov's absurd yet dogmatic desire to produce a literal "rendering, as closely as the associative and syntactical capacities of another language allow, [of] the exact contextual meaning of the original. Only this," he insisted, "is true translation." Nabokov, the greatest Russian prose stylist of the century, was willing to sacrifice everything—"elegance, euphony, clarity, good taste, modern usage, and even grammar"—on the altar of literalism. He felt he would reap his greatest reward if students used his deliberately dull version of Pushkin's sparkling stanzas as a lame trot.

Virtually all the Slavic experts agreed that the translation was hopeless. Even the partisan Brian Boyd conceded defeat and later ex-

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plained: "Unquestionably Nabokov's lines are not only unrhymed but often flat and gracelessly awkward, unlike Pushkin's, and it was this that many reviewers found a cruel betrayal of Pushkin and sufficient reason to prefer Arndt's nonsense jingles." Nabokov's friend Gleb Struve believed that Wilson "was right in criticizing Nabokov's translation . . . for the use of rare, unfamiliar, outlandish and . . . *un-Pushkinian* words."

Robert Conquest agreed that it was "too much a transposition into Nabokovese, rather than a translation into English." Edward Brown, writing in the *Slavic Review* about the revised edition, was even more severe. He asserted that "this translation of *Eugene Onegin* by one of the great craftsmen of our time is execrable. . . . [He] systematically abandons poetry and does so on the basis of a shallow and spurious 'theory' of translation." And the Harvard economist Alexander Gerschenkron, in what Wilson considered the most intelligent review, perceived that "what Nabokov sacrifices so lightheartedly and so disdainfully is not his own elegance and clarity, and euphony, but Pushkin's." Gerschenkron concluded with a convincing catalogue of Nabokov's defects: "It is indeed deplorable that so much of Nabokov's great effort is so sadly distorted by the desire to be original at all cost, by confused theorizing, by promises that never could be redeemed, by spiteful pedantry, unbridled emotions, and, last but not least, by unrestrained egotism. All this is bound to annoy some readers; it will revolt others."

All the verbal artistry that should have been applied to the translation Nabokov lavished on his learned commentary on the poem. In doing so, he surpassed his academic colleagues—who had been reluctant to recognize either his creative or his scholarly achievements—by applying to the text of Pushkin the minute taxonomic details he had so ably used in his scientific study of butterflies. He observed, for example, that in chapter 3 of *Eugene Onegin*, the "vigorous flow of events constitutes a most harmoniously constructed entity with a streamlined body and symmetrical wings."

Nabokov's extremely digressive commentary not only mimicked the Byronic digressions in Pushkin's poem but, as Clarence Brown has observed, imitated and re-created the satiric tone and scholarly structure of his brilliant novel *Pale Fire* (1962): "This work consists of an introduction by [Dr.] Kinbote, a narrative and ruminative poem entitled 'Pale Fire' by John Shade, a much longer, very detailed, even more ruminative, certainly more narrative, and I think more poetic commentary by Kinbote, and, finally, a hilarious index to the whole book."

Nabokov's commentary made two significant references to Wilson,

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which influenced Wilson's review. In the first, friendly reference (2.391), Nabokov recalled a Russian actress reading Pushkin on "a wonderful record (played for me in Talcottville by Edmund Wilson)." In the second, slightly critical reference (2.474), he stated that Pushkin's famous "description of the coming of winter . . . is well translated (with a few minor inexactitudes)" by Edmund Wilson. Wilson's brief translation, in his essay on Pushkin, had remained unchanged since its publication in 1936. But it seemed to deteriorate, in Nabokov's view, between his original edition of 1964, which provoked Wilson's hostile review, and his revised edition of 1975. In the later edition Wilson's description of winter was "translated" (rather than "well translated") with "a number of inaccuracies" (rather than "a few minor inexactitudes"). The later, retaliatory note lumped Wilson with the rest of the dunces in the commentary.

V

Nabokov, battered by the professional Slavicists, hoped that Wilson would respond favorably in the influential *New York Review of Books* to the edition that had cost so much time, thought, and labor. But in August 1964 Nabokov warned his editor that the Bollingen Foundation—which had supported and co-published his edition, but also awarded the translation prize to Arndt—"keeps looking forward to the Edmund Wilson article; but as I have mentioned before his Russian is primitive, and his knowledge of Russian literature gappy and grotesque." He also quite accurately told Andrew Field that "there were the two mirages of Wilson. That he knew Russian history better than I because of his Marxism, and that he knew at least as much about Russian literature as I." But Wilson—who felt he could hold his own with any authority when discussing a subject he had carefully studied—had confidently disputed Marxist philosophy with Sidney Hook. He now committed, according to Clarence Brown, "the almost unbelievable *hubris* of reading Nabokov several petulant little lessons about Russian grammar and vocabulary, himself blundering all the while."

Despite his limited knowledge of Russian, Wilson scored several direct hits in his lengthy attack on Nabokov's edition of Pushkin, the writer who had first drawn them together and then become the cause célèbre of their quarrel. Wilson's immediate response, which resembled storm warnings off the Cape, mentioned several criticisms that would find full expression in his forthcoming review. As he told Barbara Epstein, his editor at the *New York Review of Books*: "Just looking through it, I can see that Volodya's translation, sometimes in the

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same way, is almost as much open to objection as Arndt's. It is full of flat writing, outlandish words, and awkward phrases. And some of the things he says about the Russian language are inaccurate." Though Wilson realized he did not like the book, he could not resist the opportunity to beat Nabokov at his own game and chose to write a negative review—which might threaten and even extinguish their friendship.

Wilson's measured opening paragraph established the harsh tone of the review, which appeared on July 15, 1965, and seemed more appropriate to dealing with inept translators and doltish scholiasts than for judging the work of an intimate friend. Wilson justified his censorious tone by citing the precedent of Nabokov's assault in his commentary both on Arndt and other unfortunate meddlers with Pushkin. Wilson revealed his ambivalent feelings about Nabokov, expressed disapproval of his bad manners, and suggested his own more objective view by minimizing his own hostility and rhetorically balancing "does not propose to mask his disappointment" with "does not hesitate to underline his weaknesses":

> Vladimir Nabokov's translation of Pushkin's *Evgeni Onegin* is something of a disappointment; and the reviewer, though a personal friend of Mr. Nabokov—for whom he feels a warm affection sometimes chilled by exasperation—and an admirer of much of his work, does not propose to mask his disappointment. Since Mr. Nabokov is in the habit of introducing any job of this kind which he undertakes by an announcement that he is unique and incomparable and that everybody else who has attempted it is an oaf and an ignoramus, incompetent as a linguist and scholar, usually with the implication that he is also a low-class person and a ridiculous personality, Nabokov ought not to complain if the reviewer, though trying not to imitate Nabokov's bad literary manners, does not hesitate to underline his weaknesses.

In his blurb for *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, Wilson had compared his friend to three writers that Nabokov greatly admired: Proust, Kafka, and Gogol. But in his review of *Eugene Onegin*, Wilson deliberately wounded Nabokov by comparing him to three writers his friend particularly disliked: Marx, Dostoyevsky, and Sartre. (In 1939 Sartre had dismissed the French translation of Nabokov's *Despair*, and Nabokov had retaliated in 1949 with "Sartre's First Try," a hostile review of the American edition of *Nausea*.)

Like most other critics, Wilson found the "bald and awkward language" of Nabokov's translation, "which has nothing in common with Pushkin's or with the usual writing of Nabokov . . . more disastrous than Arndt's heroic effort." He criticized Nabokov's addiction to unfamiliar and inappropriate words and gave several examples of his uneven and at times banal translation:

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You will agree, my reader
That very nicely did our pal
act toward melancholy Tatiana.

He then spent several pages defending the words and phrases that Nabokov disapproved of in Wilson's own ("well" or inaccurately) translated stanzas of Pushkin's verse.

Wilson next zeroed in on the "lack of common sense" in Nabokov's tedious and interminable appendices about Pushkin's African ancestor and about Pushkin's prosody. The two antagonists had been heatedly arguing about Russian versification since the early 1940s, when Nabokov sent Wilson an eight-page lesson, complete with charts and diagrams. He tried to tell Wilson "you are as wrong as can be," but his lecture had been ignored. In 1950 Wilson admonished Nabokov, "You are all off, as usual," but was now weary of arguing about this stalemated subject. Nabokov's editions forced him to resume their disputations and, once again, to condemn as "ridiculous" the system of prosody invented by his old adversary. Both men loved to instruct others, but Nabokov had much more to teach Wilson, since his English was far superior to Wilson's Russian. But, according to Simon Karlinsky, Wilson was right—and Nabokov wrong—about two crucial points: Pushkin *did* know English, and English versification *is* different from Russian.

Wilson also felt the (somewhat parodic) commentary was "overdone" and showed "remarkably little sensitivity to the texture and rhythm of [Pushkin's] writing, to the skill in manipulating language." But he conceded, if one skipped the *longueurs*, that it makes "very pleasant reading, and represents an immense amount of labor." Toward the end of the review, Wilson struck at Nabokov's *deraciné* style by remarking: "What he writes is not always really English. On the other hand, he sometimes betrays . . . that he is not quite at home with Russian." He tried, however, to conclude on a more positive note by portraying Nabokov in the role he himself had assumed—that of cultural interpreter and intermediary: "In spite of his queer prejudices, which few people share—such as his utter contempt for Dostoyevsky—his sense of beauty and his literary proficiency, his energy which never seems to tire, have made him a wire of communication which vibrates between us and that Russian past." The contentious Mary McCarthy, amused and delighted by Wilson's polemic, urged him to continue the controversy.

Nabokov—though intensely aware of his own status and dignity—had put up with Wilson's ill-tempered criticism in their private correspondence. Though the hostile off-the-cuff (or off-the-Nabokov) remarks in their letters could be tolerated, he considered Wilson's

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public attack a personal insult. Wilson's offensive tone, Nabokov angrily explained to Barbara Epstein, "compels me to be quite ruthless in regard to his linguistic incompetence." But he decided, at first, to limit his letter in the *New York Review of Books*, on August 26, 1965, to refuting only the "Russian"—or weakest—part of Wilson's review, adding: "Though well aware of the real reason behind this attack, I consider this reason far too sad and private to be aired in print."

The petty philological squabbles in their letters to the editor were not nearly as interesting as the major resumption of hostilities that took place in the spring campaign of 1966. Unwilling to leave the battlefield to the apparently victorious Wilson, Nabokov changed the venue to England (where few readers would have closely followed their controversy in America) and replied at great length in the February 1966 issue of *Encounter*. He began his "Reply to My Critics" by stating that Wilson's ill-advised attack was a "polemicist's dream come true" and that he would be a "poor sportsman to disdain what it offers." He also began, as Wilson did, by mentioning their friendship and by conceding that Wilson had generously promoted his work: "I have always been grateful to him for the tact he showed in not reviewing any of my novels while constantly saying flattering things about me in the so-called literary circles where I seldom revolve." He continued in this personal vein by mocking Wilson's absurd attempt to pronounce Pushkin's poetry and seriously questioning his competence on this subject: "Upon being challenged to read *Evgeniy Onegin* aloud, he started to perform with great gusto, garbling every second word, and turning Pushkin's iambic line into a kind of spastic anapest with a lot of jaw-twisting haws and rather endearing little barks that utterly jumbled the rhythm and soon had us both in stitches." Nabokov asserted, from personal experience, that Wilson "is incapable of comprehending the mechanism of verse—either Russian or English."

Nabokov's tone became venomous as the attack shifted from Wilson himself to his review of *Eugene Onegin*. He resented Wilson's insinuation that Nabokov had read neither Theocritus nor Virgil; jeered at Wilson's ignorant Russianisms; insisted that Wilson "knows nothing" about Pushkin's knowledge of English; condemned Wilson's "ludicrous display of pseudo-scholarship"; and defended his own savage digs at established reputations—including Wilson's. In 1949 he had told Wilson that "I liked your book [*The Triple Thinkers*] very much." But in his *Encounter* "Reply," he emphasized their different approach to literature and mocked "the old-fashioned, naïve, and musty method of human-interest criticism championed by Mr. Wilson . . . [and exemplified by] Wilson's extraordinary misconceptions in *The Triple Thinkers*."

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Nabokov concluded by referring to Wilson's letter in the *New York Review of Books* of August 26, 1965—which suggested that Wilson had miscalculated both the severity of his attack and the bitter wound it inflicted on Nabokov—and loftily withdrew from the conflict: "Mr. Wilson says that on rereading his article he felt it sounded 'more damaging' than he had meant it to be. His article, entirely consisting, as I have shown, of quibbles and blunders, can be damaging only to his own reputation—and that is the last look I shall ever take at this dismal scene."

Nabokov's and Wilson's antithetical approach to *Eugene Onegin* concentrated on the most dramatic event in Pushkin's "novel in verse": the fatal duel between Onegin and Lenski. Both authors, themselves engaged in an intellectual duel, believed their personal honor was involved. Both not only used Pushkin's duel as a symbol of their own conduct, but also interpreted it in a way that (perhaps unconsciously) revealed their own motivation. In his 1936 essay on Pushkin, Wilson had observed: "Evgeny has killed in the most cynical fashion a man whose friend he had believed himself to be and whom he had thought he did not want to kill. . . . Evgeny had been jealous of him, because Lensky has been able to feel for Olga an all-absorbing emotion, whereas Evgeny, loved so passionately by Tatyana, has been unable to feel anything at all."

In his review published thirty years after his essay on Pushkin, Wilson criticized Nabokov's failure to interpret the fundamental point of the central situation: "He finds himself unable to account for Evgeni's behavior." Wilson then repeated his original interpretation, which took on a new meaning in the context of the quarrel between the intellectual critic (Onegin-Wilson) and the passionate artist (Lenski-Nabokov). Onegin "thinks Lensky a fool yet he envies him. He cannot stand it that Lensky . . . should be fired by ecstatic emotion. So, taking a mean advantage—raising slowly, we are told, his pistol, in malignant cold blood—he aims to put out that fire." Just as Wilson's review inadvertently revealed his own "malignant cold blood," so Nabokov's commentary on *Eugene Onegin* suggests his motives for changing his mind, airing the "sad and private" reasons for Wilson's attack and bitterly answering his old friend: "In modern Russia little remains of the idea of honor—pure personal honor. . . . Lenski's course of action [in challenging his dearest friend, who had recklessly flirted with Lenski's fiancée], far from being a temperamental extravaganza, is the only logical course an honorable man could have taken." In "Reply to My Critics" Nabokov notes that "Pushkin stresses the fact that Onegin 'sincerely loves the youth' but that *amour propre* is sometimes stronger than friendship."

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VI

Wilson did not reply to Nabokov's "Reply," and their lively and affectionate correspondence inevitably ceased. But five years later, in March 1971, Nabokov responded to news from their mutual friend Harry Levin that the seventy-six-year-old Wilson was seriously ill with heart disease. In his last letter to Wilson, Nabokov made a magnanimous gesture of conciliation: "A few days ago I had the occasion to reread the whole batch . . . of our correspondence. It was such a pleasure to feel again the warmth of your many kindnesses, the various thrills of our friendship, that constant excitement of art and intellectual discovery. . . . Please believe that I have long ceased to bear you a grudge for your incomprehensible incomprehension of Pushkin and Nabokov's *Onegin*." Wilson, always more belligerent, was glad to get Nabokov's letter. But (in *his* last letter) he warned his old comrade-in-arms that he would soon have two pieces on Nabokov in press. He was revising his review of *Eugene Onegin* for *A Window on Russia*—correcting his own errors in Russian and "citing a few more of your ineptitudes"—and had included an account of his 1957 visit to the Nabokovs in Ithaca in the forthcoming *Upstate*. "I hope it will not again impair our personal relations," he told Nabokov—but he seemed to fear that it would. Ten days later, Wilson bitterly informed Helen Muchnic: "Nabokov has suddenly written me a letter telling me that he values my friendship and that all has been forgiven. He has been told that I have been ill, and it always makes him cheerful to think that his friends are in bad shape."

The two proud peacocks had always been hypersensitive about each other's behavior. In the early 1940s, when Wilson and Mary McCarthy were in the front seat of a car and the Nabokovs in the rear, Vladimir "leaned forward and nimbly removed Wilson's awful brown hat." Ignoring Nabokov, Wilson turned to Vera and remarked: "Your husband has a rather strange sense of humor." (Wilson's response to such pranks was remarkably like that of his father's. When called to the window by his wife, who claimed to have seen an accident and then cried "April Fool!" Edmund Senior sourly said: "Madame, I don't think that's funny!") On another occasion, when Mary McCarthy had gone to great trouble to prepare cherries jubilee for the Nabokovs, Vladimir had mocked the absurdly hot and cold American confection. Though testy himself about Nabokov's behavior, Wilson noted in the 1971 addition to his review of *Eugene Onegin*: "Like all persons who enjoy malicious teasing and embarrassing practical jokes, [Nabokov] is invariably aggrieved and indignant when anyone tries anything of the kind on himself."

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Wilson's visit to Ithaca in late May 1957 got off to a bad start. He had a painful attack of gout and Nabokov met the wrong train. In his account of this visit in *Upstate* (1971), Wilson noted that his friend was exhausted from overwork, that his nerves were on edge, and that he suddenly shifted from a benign to an aggressive temper. Nabokov told Wilson that Onegin was going to marry Lolita, whom he had met at the University of Alaska. He "was at first amusing and charming, then relapsed into his semi-humorous, semi-disagreeable mood, when he is always contradicting and always trying to score, though his statements may be quite absurd." The devoted Vera, as usual, sided with her husband and became hostile if anyone argued with him. Wilson's gout forced him to eat dinner on the couch, with his leg on a footstool; and he thought, "It irked Vera a little to have to serve me thus. She so concentrates on Volodya that she grudges special attention to anyone else, and [a bit of a governess and prude] she does not like my bringing him pornographic books."

Wilson not only mildly criticized Nabokov's moods, hospitality, and wife (about whom Nabokov felt very protective), but also offered a Freudian theory (which Nabokov particularly disliked) about Nabokov's years in exile in order to account for the repulsive aspect of his fiction: "I always enjoy seeing them—what we have are really intellectual romps, sometimes accompanied by a mauling—but I am always afterwards left with a somewhat uncomfortable impression. The element in his work that I find repellent is his addiction to *Schadenfreude* [malicious pleasure]. Everybody is always being humiliated. He himself . . . must have suffered a good deal of humiliation." Despite this criticism, Wilson concluded his description with a tribute to Nabokov's personal courage and dedication to his art: "He is in many ways an admirable person, a strong character, a terrific worker, unwavering in his devotion to his family, with a rigor in his devotion to his art which has something in common with Joyce's. . . . The miseries, horrors and handicaps that he has had to confront in his exile would have degraded or broken many, but these have been overcome by his fortitude and his talent."

The aristocratic Nabokov had always controlled his interviewers and biographers by demanding that they submit their questions in writing and in advance, and by revising whatever they had written about him. The suggestion—in Wilson's ambivalent though essentially sympathetic memoir—that he was rude and inhospitable was, he believed, an invasion of his privacy, an insult to his wife, and an affront to his honor. Vera may also have been offended by *Upstate* and urged Nabokov to retaliate. He felt that after forgiving Wilson's vicious review and renewing their friendship—as Wilson himself should

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have done—he had once again been subjected to an unprovoked assault. Nabokov had not, in fact, taken his last look at the dismal scene. But, as he explained to the editor of the *New York Times Book Review*, which published his corrosive letter on November 7, 1971, he was not merely "airing a grievance but firmly stopping a flow of vulgar and fatuous invention on Wilson's part."

Nabokov's last letter to the press is more fierce and furious than anything he ever wrote about Wilson. Believing that he had been victimized by Wilson's "conjecture, ignorance and invention," he once again rejected Wilson's views on Russian versification, defended his wife against Wilson's criticism, and condemned his theory of humiliation:

> His muddleheaded and ill-informed description of Russian prosody only proves that he remains organically incapable of reading, let alone understanding, my work on the subject. Equally inconsistent with facts—and typical of his Philistine imagination—is his impression that at parties in our Ithaca house my wife "concentrated" on me and grudged "special attention to anyone else."
>
> A particularly repulsive blend of vulgarity and naïveté is reflected in his notion that I must have suffered "a good deal of humiliation" because as the son of a liberal noble I was not "accepted (!) by the strictly illiberal nobility."

Wilson's published diary was so "vindictive and fatuous," Nabokov exclaimed, that—had he known Wilson was nourishing such hostile feelings—he would have immediately asked him to leave his house. Returning to the concept of honor that defined Onegin's character, Nabokov bitterly concluded: "I am aware that my former friend is in poor health but in the struggle between the dictates of compassion and those of personal honor the latter wins."

Wilson's great authority as a critic enabled him to make or break reputations of contemporary writers, and he was usually (except with Nabokov) very generous about his friends' work. Nabokov had consistently praised Wilson's books; and in letters written to Nabokov between 1945 and 1953 Wilson repeatedly mentioned that he planned to write a long essay about Nabokov for the *Atlantic* or *The New Yorker*. Although Wilson liked *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, he was "disappointed" (his favorite word about Nabokov's works) in *Bend Sinister* and the later novels. Since he could not help Nabokov by giving his frank opinion, he thought it best not to review his books. Wilson disliked the elaborate artifice and lack of social context in Nabokov's novels. And he was unsympathetic to the satiric portrayal of a series of fictional heroes who were, like Wilson himself, highly intellectual and emotionally repressed.

Wilson had the last word in their quarrel—after his death in June

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1972. He did not make restitution, as he had done with Fitzgerald, but finally delivered, in the form of a critical time bomb, the judgment of his work that Nabokov had awaited for thirty years. In the posthumously published *A Window on Russia*, Wilson attacked, for the last time, Nabokov's belief that Pushkin knew almost no English and remarked on his surprisingly limited knowledge of Russia. He "despises the Communist regime and, it seems to me, does not even understand how it works or how it came to be." Turning to Nabokov's works, Wilson ignored his early masterpiece *The Gift*, found the other Russian novels—*Mary, King, Queen, Knave, Invitation to a Beheading,* and *The Defense*, which ache with pain for the loss of Russia—static and disappointing, and dismissed them all in less than two pages. When examining the English novels (in only one page), he ignored the dazzling *Pale Fire*, revived the *Schadenfreude*-humiliation theory he had first expressed in *Upstate*, dismissed *Bend Sinister*, *Pnin*, and *Lolita*, and found *Ada* stupendously boring.

In 1976, four years after Bunny's last word, Volodya, in a letter to the English novelist and critic John Wain, alluded to—but did not explain—the real reasons for Wilson's attack. The Pushkin controversy, Nabokov wrote, "revealed not only ignorance of Russian on EW's part, but also a bizarre animosity that he appears to have been nursing since the late nineteen-fifties." Since he dates Wilson's animosity from the time of his own astonishing success with *Lolita*, Wilson's envy of Nabokov and desire to pull down the high-flying novelist cannot be dismissed. But Wilson's motives were more complex than that. Well aware of what he called Nabokov's "insatiable and narcissistic vanity," he certainly underestimated the "damaging" effect of his review and naïvely thought their friendship could somehow survive it. As late as 1971 he tried to minimize his own responsibility and claimed, with disingenuous innocence, that his "attempts to tease Nabokov were not recognized as such but received in a virulent spirit, and his retaliation was protracted."

The remark of another touchy beneficiary, Edward Dahlberg, illuminates Wilson's generous but patronizing attitude to Nabokov: "He never ceased to show me kindnesses . . . and [was] quite ready to help a writer provided he felt he was superior to him." When Wilson had all the advantages (an established reputation, extensive contacts, an editorial position, and considerable influence in the literary world), he could afford to be generous to the proud Nabokov, who had come from an immensely rich family and had been forced, at first, to live on charity in America. But when Nabokov refused to become his disciple and then surpassed him—as Fitzgerald had done—in art, wealth, and fame, Wilson became embittered and vindictive.

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Wilson had the "intellectual arrogance and unconscious assumption of superiority" that he attributed to Lincoln in *Patriotic Gore*; and his "impulse to wound," as he said of Ambrose Bierce, "was involved with a vulnerable pride." The intensely competitive Wilson, who always (as Hannah Arendt told Mary McCarthy) wanted to prove how intelligent he was, boldly challenged Nabokov on his own scholarly turf. Wilson's old friend Lillian Hellman, though not discussing his relations with Nabokov, penetrated to the core of their quarrel when she observed that Wilson was always gallant with women, but "if you were a man and not prepared to pay him proper obeisance, he would have to knock you down intellectually by demonstrating that he knew more about your subject than you did, had read key books that you hadn't in languages you didn't know, and otherwise establish himself as the brightest guy on the block."

The real beneficiaries of the *Eugene Onegin* quarrel were the literary editors who got all the controversial letters and profitable publicity for nothing (even Robert Lowell jumped into the fray on Wilson's behalf), and the readers who delighted in the cut and slash, the revelations and insults, of two great literary figures. But when the dust had settled, the lives of Wilson and Nabokov had each been diminished by the loss of a treasured and irreplaceable friend. Wilson once told Nabokov that he had had "great fun during the *Onegin* exchange." But Nabokov disagreed and failed to relish the controversy in the way that Wilson did. Nabokov found it intellectually exciting but quite ghastly, and was horrified when his intimate companion suddenly and incomprehensibly attacked him. In July 1972, a month after Wilson's death, Vera tried to calm the troubled waters of the past by writing to Wilson's half-Russian wife: "I would like to tell you . . . how fond Vladimir has always been of Edmund despite the unfortunate turn in their late relations. We always think of Edmund in terms of past friendship and affection, not of the so unnecessary hostilities of recent years." And in May 1974, when Wilson's widow was gathering their letters for publication, Nabokov, saddened by their quarrel, wrote: "I need not tell you what agony it was rereading the exchanges belonging to the early radiant era of our correspondence."

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A Day in April

BARBARA VAN NOORD

Today I gave all my memories away
to see who I am when they are gone.

In the supermarket, I gave my grandmother
with her rhinestones and colored hair
to a young woman selecting oranges.

Later, I gave my grandfather,
with his lovely buttons that hung
like prayers from his vest,
to a bookseller who had nothing to do all day
but read.

I gave my own childhood
to a child sitting on a fire hydrant,
looking at her toes.

She took my bicycle,
my rubber dolls, the attic, the pine forest,
and the mailbox down the road set
too far out, which from this distance
looks like the boogeyman.

There was so much, it was difficult to collect
and hand over, and the child, chin in hands,
reminded me also to give her my favorite
book of Oz.

I hesitated, but I gave
my mother to a woman weeping on the telephone.
She took my mother's voice, and they were gone.

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I gave away my sisters and my brother,
my several dogs, the parakeets, three houses
in succession, an afternoon tornado
and the flickering of headlights
through the venetian blinds
when it is time for bed.

And last, I gave my father to an older man
with stubble on his cheeks, who sat
alone and thoughtful on the steps of a church.

This was the most difficult of all.
I gave the man the long overcoat
and the fedora, a 1957 round-backed Chevy
and a later model Oldsmobile;

I gave him
a red silk smoking jacket and a grin which has
a brief glimpse of gold tooth near the back.

The only memory I could not give away
was my father's later madness, the fires
he could not quench that kept igniting
under the bed.

So I am left with that
in midst of a large space, a clearing in which
it is almost springtime, but not quite.

I am looking at the sky, noticing
how the starlings fly up all together,
a wild calligraphy,

my language,
everything it contains.

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Cavafy

EUGENE SCHLANGER

If history was the province of this
Alexandrian Greek, his memories
Of Levantine kings, ancient wayfaring,
Would fill the pantheon with sad splendor:
Cries of anguish from the besieged cities
As their pathetic elders cast about,
Listlessly, for an immortal to blame—
Inhuman failure. Old men asleep
At streaked tables in small cafés, tired
Of dreams, of dynasties, until they quake,
Awakening to—with the frenzy of—
Princes at the end of their princely reigns.
You know their descent, and their families.
As you grope, among Roman historians,
Through the galleries of your memory,
His lyrics foster your first attempts:
A chalice of private positive sadness,
The afterthoughts of civilization,
Exiles afoot, in the books of the dead.

✪ EUGENE SCHLANGER practices law on Wall Street. His most recent contribution to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR was "Alcibiades."

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"Les Roses, Mademoiselle"

The Universe of Michel de Ghelderode

RENÉE C. FOX

"COME PREFERABLY AT FIVE O'CLOCK," Michel de Ghelderode had written to me. "The light changes then." And so it was late in the afternoon when I left the Brussels apartment where I was living in July 1961 to make my first visit to the renowned Belgian playwright, poet, storyteller, and writer of letters. My taxi moved swiftly down fashionable Avenue Louise, past the baroque Palace of Justice, and through the Place Royale of government ministries and the Société Générale, toward 71, rue Lefrancq, the house in Schaarbeek, a working-class district of Brussels, where Ghelderode and his wife Jeanne resided. As my cab proceeded along the Chaussée de Haecht, the domed basilica of the Eglise Sainte Marie loomed before me like a portal. Behind this church lay the address I was seeking.

The windows of their apartment were covered with green shutters when I arrived, and the big, green front door felt massively shut. But as soon as I pushed the brass bell marked "Michel de Ghelderode," his wife opened the door and ushered me into—I can think of it no other way—"the Ghelderodean universe."

Michel de Ghelderode was at his worktable in the salon, seated in a carved, thronelike Spanish chair, over which a crimson velvet cover, gold embroidered with some kind of ecclesiastical or royal insignia, had been draped. He was a large-boned man, made lean by illness. His straight, brown, maestro-style hair was combed neatly behind his big ears, accentuating his high forehead, prominent cheekbones, and long, ample nose. Although his mouth was thin, and drawn down by suffering, its sensual fullness in healthier, younger days was still discernible. His startlingly pale blue eyes, with their very dark pupils, dominated his hollowed-out and haunted face. His gaze came from

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some transfixing place inside of himself, and his eyes seemed to be hearing as well as seeing invisible things. His elegant artist's hands, of which he was not unaware, protruded gracefully from the sleeves of his velour jacket.

But Ghelderode's appearance was eclipsed by the "assault of images" that the furnishings of his salon and the spell of his words unleashed in me. "My little museum of inexpressible things, my collection of imponderables," was the way that he referred to the salon and the objects in it. We talked surrounded by masks from Belgian carnivals and kermesses; marionettes from the traditional puppet theaters of Brussels and Liège; seashells from the beaches of Ostend in Flanders; swords and scabbards; ancient Madonnas; crucifixes; Church hangings; a Gothic stone frieze reputedly a fragment from the sculptured face of Brussels's Hôtel de Ville; mannequins in various states of dress and undress; two carousel horses; and whole walls of Belgian paintings.

The antiquely musical sound of his voice made me think of a harpsichord. It filled the room with his exquisite, lavishly poetic and theatrical French—infused somehow with the enormous energy, the sensual joy, and the hallucinatory terror of Flanders. As he spoke, the objects in the salon took on life, as if animated by the enchantment of his words.

Before I left at sunset, Madame de Ghelderode served me many large cups of savory coffee and a whole platter of tastefully arranged, delicious pâtisserie. It must be she, I thought, the good Belgian housewife, who keeps the Ghelderodean museum so exquisitely neat, systematically arranged—and perfectly dusted!

Several days later, I received a handwritten letter from Michel de Ghelderode in response to my thank-you note. He had been reluctant to have me come, he admitted, because he was only beginning to emerge from a long and grave state of illness, and he feared that his appearance might cause me "some pain and disappointment." Arriving at his doorstep and entering his house at this point in his life meant that I would have to accept seeing him in the same state "as that of the objects that surround me, wounded, worn by age, scratched. . . . But they have their poetic resonance," he added, "these humble things that were beautiful at the beginning. Would they be *pathétiques* and worthy of tenderness if they did not carry the trace of their former existence?" In any case, he hoped that health was now "quickly returning" to him and that "it will not take many days before I lose this dilapidated style."

Ghelderode wanted me to know that whatever apprehension he may have had about my visit before I crossed "the threshold of [his] solitude" had been dispelled by my somewhat "immaterial . . . pres-

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ence" and the "moving memory" with which my visit left his "companion" and himself:

> But no, you are not a stranger to me, and without ever having seen you I recognized you but from where, when? My wife felt the same sentiment, without being able to explain it. . . . It is not necessary to search; one must accept Destiny and the souls that Destiny sends us. . . . Do we know very much in this world?

"Your gentleness," Ghelderode continued, "your meditation, your sort of radiant wisdom express and reveal your rank in the poetic universe." He associated my aura, he said, with "the image of the rose, the most complete of flowers":

> . . . quasi-carnal and with a perfume that evokes angels—the roses of Ronsard that express passion and tenderness, forged together! It is the royal flower, more so than the lily, and I will teach you that in my ancient country of Flanders and of Brabant, it was the flower of Coronations, of joyous entrances, of princely marriages, of the triumphs of rhetoricians and artists: a chapel of roses [meaning a hat or a crown] was accorded to the personage on whom one wished to confer honor on pageant days. The victors in combats also, like Saint George or Saint Michael, enemies of the oriental Dragons in whom Claudel saw the devil in his last metamorphosis!

Ghelderode invited me to come and see them often, whenever I wanted, at any time it suited me. "You need never feel lonely or exiled," he declared, "because my house and my heart are open to you. We are, my wife and I, your spiritual and emotional family." "I will try," he promised, "to make your stay easier in this country which is very beautiful and contains more than one would dare to imagine."

His letter ended with a "vision" that he wished to impart to me. Although he was ill and "in the twilight of [his] destiny," he wrote, "so tenacious still is my love of life, my faith in men and their becoming, that I cannot abandon myself to bitter thoughts, to nocturnal philosophies without signs of hope from better skies, where human beings end by finding their redemption, their transfiguration of what was their primitive condition, perhaps that of angels, from their tragedy, crumbling into the abysses fortified by the infinite."

Because Ghelderode's letter, and the visit with him and his wife had touched things deep inside me, I sent them twelve, long-stemmed Baccarat roses. One day later, the postman brought me another message from Ghelderode—the most extraordinary letter I have ever received. It was written in his eighteenth-century script, with an old wooden pen dipped in an inkwell, on four long parchment pages. The cover page, imprinted with a royal stamp and the date 1720, was filled with a pen-and-ink drawing he had made of a huge, single rose

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in a vase, around which strange forms—some with wings—floated. "Les Roses, Mademoiselle!" the text of the letter began on its second parchment page, bordered with another Ghelderodean sketch of a gigantic rose—this one, without a vase or phantasmagoric shapes:

What a beautiful gesture of an artist yours was—and how you express the quality of my joy, I should say our joy—for are we not in my house but two souls in one . . . in a play of mirrors?

You see me embarrassed before this gift from your hands, such as one finds painted on the shutters of ancient altar pieces.

You will be happy when I state that you have been vested with Poetry, in a privileged way, as a second breath invigorating the world of learned truth with its corrective action—[Poetry] that precedes the Infinite and brings you revealed truth. . . .

These carnivalesque flowers impose the nostalgia of their imminent perishing! It is a law, is it not, ours and that of the pure, the poets, to give in the fashion of these roses of Holocaust, the best of their fervor, of their song, and of their vision even if this calls attention to how naked they are! Must we not very quickly return to ashes after having decreed to unknown persons, to possible hearts, our spiritual feast, our color, our perfume—it should be said, our virtues?

There is the speech about the noble rose: a single one of them is sufficient to put me in a state of grace!

[The roses] sumptuously light my hermetic room full of strange forms, impossible creatures, cosmic phantoms in a traveling theater décor where the Old Temptation of Saint Anthony is playing, that all our satiric painters of the centuries have evoked as much out of love of the Carnal Saint of the Angels as for the surrealistic devils who inhabited their nights with mad music and violent spectacles! . . . I forget my recent tribulations in [the roses], the physicians of Molière dancing their ballet, the *Danse Macabre* also that I must forget, and in which I failed to make my entrance, thank God!

Scarcely had they arrived, when your flowers are scoured by a summer storm, and open up with a violent and provocative suddenness, pearled with celestial water, like curiously budding creatures! . . . Will they speak, in a sort of spasm, at the command of magicianly thunder? . . .

Belles comme le péché!

Michel de Ghelderode

At the bottom of the letter, alongside his description of the storm-seized roses, Ghelderode had drawn another sketch: a small vase, filled with roses that had become eyes, over which an ambiguous entity, more angelic than demonic, hovered.

This is the dramatic and mysterious way that one of the most profound and important relationships of my life began. Measured in calendar time, it was brief. Michel de Ghelderode died less than a year after I met him—on April 1, 1962, two days before he turned sixty-four. But viewed in a Ghelderodean perspective, what he called "our great friendship" spanned two generations and two different stages in

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the life cycle—his and mine—four seasons, and almost an entire liturgical year. It was perpetuated by his wife Jeanne and me, over the eighteen years that she survived him, through our correspondence, and our long visits during my annual trips to Belgium. My emotional and spiritual encounter with Michel de Ghelderode transported me into that frightening but strangely beautiful innermost place where my unconscious and the cultural symbolism of Belgium met. In a sense, he "took me to images" that I already knew but had never before dared to acknowledge or contemplate fully. In his letters to me, Ghelderode referred to Belgium as "this astonishing country of dream and action, of art and monuments, haunted by luminosity, by contrast, by meteoric spasms, which is ours and yours in sharing. Because you understand it," he said. "And people possess what they understand. You love it, too."

In part, Ghelderode was my teacher. He wanted to help me learn as much as possible about the "familiar by-streets" and the "buried strangeness" (a phrase from Richard Wilbur's poem "A Hole in the Floor") of his home country—about the shapes and odors, the voices and silences of its past, and their incarnation in its present. Some of his teaching was explicitly didactic. He encouraged me to spend time in Belgian museums. "There are many secrets inside our museums in Ghent, in Bruges, in Brussels!" In this "Country of Painting, so rich in hours of creative art," he said, he wanted me to "live a little of its hallucinatory past" through the works of historical and contemporary masters like Breughel and Bosch and Ensor—paintings that had led him "toward the art of theater," and inspired some of his plays. He also counseled me about how to derive the most value from these experiences. "Try to visit [the museum] in old Brussels before your departure. On your own. That is best. You are too much sovereign of your faculties to need a minister to help you prevail over this illusory world!" Occasionally, his instruction took the form of giving me some of his less-known works to read:

> I inscribe this little "*acte mystique*" [he wrote on the title page of his "mystical farce," *Les Vieillards*] which will tell you how much I am and continue to be close to the popular heart, in this Flanders of imagery. . . . You will see that the poet of this nation with such an intense past, metaphysically so rich, still produces realistic [works], close to the soil.

Ghelderode also taught me about Belgium through the "reality" dimensions of his plays and stories. An astute social observer and critic, he transposed his perceptions of current Belgian life, and his commentary on it, to Flanders and Brabant in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The characters in his play, *Mademoiselle Jaïre*, for

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example, are "just as you might meet at random in the miniatures of the Burgundian period. Some wear turbans or preserve elements of orientalism in their dress," as they did in the port town of Bruges in a "bygone age." These characters "may seem to be invented," Ghelderode remarked, "but their voices betray inflections that could be caught nowadays by acute listening." When he wrote for the Toone Marionette Theatre of Brussels, Ghelderode made the puppets speak in the popular dialect, and with the folk humor of the men and women who lived in the city's working-class Marolles district. Not only did he capture the distinctive language and comedic sense of such local milieux, but he also ironically portrayed the particularism and the possessive love of things that he discerned in Belgians throughout the land.

Ghelderode made it plain that he did not read the works of social scientists. In his view, their analytic perspective was antithetic to the "instinct," "vision," and "divination" by which "the dramatic author must live." Yet he supported my own participant observation-based sociological research in Belgium, considering it analogous in some ways to his own observations of everyday life in Belgian society and his immersion in its culture, which were vital to his art. He even suggested that when I wrote about Belgium it might be more effective—and safer, too—if, like him, I transferred what I had noted and wished to say to a past century.

But it was primarily through the language of images and symbols that Ghelderode inducted me into the "ambiance" and the soul of the country that he inhabited and that inhabited him. He opened his salon to me, where the ancient and modern artifacts of Belgian culture that he had collected—what he called his "*objets étranges*" (strange objects)—were evocatively displayed. Under the spell of his theatrical genius and his magician-like qualities, the objects became live presences, sending messages that he helped me to perceive and decipher.

Ghelderode also gave me some of his "image-beings" as gifts—a wooden pen; a tiny, marionette-like doll; a watercolor portrait of him surrounded by objects and images from his salon and his plays; a photograph, in which he was mounted like a chevalier on his favorite carousel horse, Borax. "For Renée Claire Fox—wounded angel with tender eyes. . . . A flame that the wind can curve, but extinguish, no. . . . In offering her this image of my obsessions and phantoms, I offer her my friendship, always," is the way he inscribed the watercolor.

With romantic tenderness, mischievous humor, and skill, Ghelderode gave me the best of his vision, in ways that opened the inner

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chambers of Belgium—and of myself—to me. He recognized the yearning writer in me, asserting from the outset that I had been "vested with Poetry." He brought that part of me to the surface by releasing the imagery in me and making me less fearful of it. He counted me among those who were "sensitive to the supernatural," he said—"to the secret signal from a mystic country." And he linked this spiritual perception with the capacity to make, as well as to hear, poetry. I, in turn, responded to him both religiously and artistically.

Ghelderode was highly attuned to religious symbols, rituals, and signs: to old churches and chapels; to priestly vestments and liturgical chants; to religious offices, processions, and funerals (which he considered supreme, "stage-managed" performances); to statues of the Virgin Mary (the Notre Dame of Solitude and Sorrow, rather than "rosy" Madonnas, with self-satisfied expressions of "having so marvelously given birth"); and to the "everlasting language" that he said had accompanied him all of his life—the "aerial music" of the bells and the carillons of Flanders, "both the tragic bells with bloody mouths and the triumphant with golden tongues." Prophets and saints, priests and bishops, angels and devils, Mary, Joseph, and Jesus, and the many visages of Death crowd the pages of Ghelderode's stories and plays. Like the Primitive Flemish painters, he placed them in the houses, the villages, the towns, the squares, the courtyards, the streets, and the fields of Belgium "in olden times," and he gave them Belgian faces and garments. Ghelderode seemed to feel intimately acquainted with the members of the Holy Family and with certain saints like St. Francis and St. Anthony; his whole metabolism moved in the rhythm of the liturgical calendar.

Ghelderode was not a practicing Catholic, in the conventional sense of the term. He did not attend Mass. He was passionately critical of the "official Church" because of its emphasis on obedience and dogma rather than on "the eternal sob of prostrate man . . . at the foot of the incomprehensible Cross." The priests in the cast of characters of his plays were often more "ugly" and less holy than the unordained populace to whom they supposedly ministered, and they were suffused with a decaying "clerical odor." He was no more a Catholic author, Ghelderode insisted, than he was a national Belgian one. Rather, what he tried to write were "*patriale*" works that were "ancestral and traditionally of my home," while expressing "the man of my time everywhere . . . and through him man eternal." But the imagery of Belgian Catholicism was in Ghelderode and all around him. It pervaded his salon, his letters to me, his theater, and his being. My friendship with him made me see and feel the Catholicism of Belgian culture and the Belgianness of its Catholicism. And in the

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process, old churches, madonnas, carillons, and roses came to dwell in my Jewish-American soul.

I was at home in New York when I received Ghelderode's last letter. It was written on March 1, 1962, in the season when the "violet days" of Lent were approaching:

Great Friend, faraway princess!

There are silhouettes like yours, so intensely poetic, that traverse the Theatre of our friend Maeterlinck, the author of Pelléas and Mélisande! Slender, pure-bred, far-reaching gaze, as far as the stars. . . . What is an ocean between our hearts? For Jeanne, for me, we stretch out our hand and we touch yours. In the fogs, you are a phosphorescent statue. . . . I pity you in that hallucinatory, glacial city, where humanity is no longer more than a frightened herd, that watches the sky, not in the direction of the angels, but for a rocket that this time transports a madman, [and] tomorrow will transport Death in person! Oh Poetry! And the solemn silence of my dear old room, at twilight. . . . And the look . . . of my companion, who holds you in such tender friendship! Thanks to God! I ask nothing else, except the spring—and a few radiant friendships like the one you devote to me and that lights my last years. . . . I have written very little to you, you who have spoken so much to me, from afar, from near—because you have remained close to us. . . . Sickness, yes. You knew it, no need to report it to you. Since January 1. And the cold, the ice! I shivered near the fire, poor little human being, contemplating the old black trees. And then sleep. . . . I forgot all . . . except you, friend, . . . and a few others—heralds of this Friendship as necessary as love. . . . I cannot maintain this muteness much longer. Hope is reviving, the sun mounts higher each day—our days are better—yes. . . . How much gratitude I owe you for all the signs of your vigilant affection . . . of very beautiful hours. . . .

Jeanne, very tired, because of me! What sacrifices. There are days when I want to cry when I think of the poor lot I give her. She never complains. If she were not near me, I would let myself slide into nothingness, I confess to you; I would sleep forever. Exhausted from suffering, physically also; because these last months, I have undergone the anguish of being, of existing, and also the desire to no longer be. . . . But there is this creature who has fought so hard for me and my work: then there is my unfinished work . . . this Theater, still two more volumes. Some tales, Twilight Tales, you will like them I feel. It is very much me. It is Ghelderode, it is your friend, your "human brother," as Maître François Villon says to Louis XI in the ballads. . . . Condemned not to go out, I who do not ask to leave the room where I have all, my books, my paintings, my images, a vision of the garden, sometimes a visit, and letters coming from everywhere. You will have better news soon. Brussels-Capital gilds itself with sun—but what a winter. . . . They are playing me in Paris, *La Balade du Grand Macabre*, [put on] by the Free Theatre of the University of Brussels. . . . As for success, I scoff at it. Glory is a lie. Only the heart counts. The only thing that matters is to be loved, love, affection, outstretched hands. . . .

Great friend, *au revoir!* lassitude overtakes me; I am still very weak! . . . The violet days of Christian liturgy are coming, the desolation of the empty Taber-

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nacle, God absent! The churches are strange these holy days, Holy Thursday, Good Friday—and then, the Pascal explosion, the carillons of Flanders, the bells in the belfries that ring out: *Alléluia!* He is risen! Nature also! And the harvesters of Breughel arrive with flasks on their hips!

Don't let me leave you without speaking of you, of your work, of your projects. Jeanne embraces you, and I, your old friend of the heart, rich with childhood, I send you my most tender smile. . . . Come back to us, dear Renée Claire Fox; that will be festival and joy!

He did not live to hear the carillons of Flanders ring on Easter Sunday.

Ghelderode called me a friend, a younger sister, a wounded angel, a flame, a phosphorescent statue in the fog, and a faraway princess. He associated me with certain feminine "silhouettes" in the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Maurice Maeterlinck. My eyes, he said, were "not of this world, of a woman, a simple creature." He likened my hair, and the way I wore it—long, "loose" and "abundant"—to that of "The Women of the Tomb in our Primitives [paintings] of Flanders and Brabant." And in the letter that he wrote to me on the eve of my departure for the United States, he addressed me as "the Skinny Angel, ready for flight."

Authenticity and ardor, imagination and whimsy were commingled in the ethereally romantic way in which Ghelderode saw and wrote about me. He responded to certain of my personal qualities, embroidered artistically upon them, and projected me into the final acts of his theater and his life.

I came to his house bearing roses and crossed the threshold of his salon when he was mortally ill. I arrived there from the "faraway" land of New York City in America: a young, modern country that fascinated him, but frightened him, too, because it was so different from the Old Europe in which he dwelled. I was an emissary, from that foreign place where his plays were coming to be known, with whom he could communicate—a slender young woman, with long, dark hair and dark eyes, whose appearance pleased him, and an intellectual, whose speech and gestures were literary.

I was young, from a young country, but I had what Ghelderode felt was an "old soul," partly because I was Jewish. He never discussed my Jewishness with me, but it was important to him. In his eyes, it connected me with his favorite statue of "Our Lady," the "*Vierge noire*" (Black Virgin) in St. Catherine's Church in Brussels, whom he regarded as a more genuine and pure representation of Mary than the blonde-haired, blue-eyed Madonnas whom one usually saw in Belgian churches and paintings. Like her, I looked the way that

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Ghelderode thought a "granddaughter of King David" should.

I was an old soul, too, because I was already intimately acquainted with illness and death. At the age of seventeen, I had contracted a nearly fatal case of polio, which had left visible marks on me. In Ghelderode's words, I was "wounded" by illness, as he himself was. But "skinny" and "wounded angel" though I was, in Ghelderode's moral view I had demonstrated that I had tenacious hope and a supreme Belgian virtue—the "*courage*" to overcome adversity.

However serious and sincere Ghelderode was, if I had been so flattered by his romantic portrait of me that I failed to recognize its playfulness and humor, so awed by his dramatic self-presentation that I did not discern its staged aspects, or so out of touch with everyday reality that I could not participate in the down-to-earth dimensions of his life with Jeanne, our friendship would never have become what it was.

But from the beginning to the end, I was, above all, the Mademoiselle of the roses. In Ghelderode's emblematic universe, roses and death were associated. Death, he exclaimed, was as beautiful as "roses in the snow." In a letter to a fellow poet, Garcia Lorca, he declared that he was "now writing a kind of *opening-the-veins* poetry altogether averted from reality, with a feeling that reflects all my love for things and all my mocking of things. My love of death and poking fun at her." In his autobiographical *Ostend Interviews*, he went on to say: "I laugh at death . . . and make fun of her, but she will return, be certain of that. Although you do not love her, she remains with you, and she is the only person of whose fidelity you can be certain. Crown her with roses!" To this day I wonder whether, along with the other ways that he identified me, Michel de Ghelderode also thought I was a sign, if not a messenger, of his imminent death.

Jeanne de Ghelderode, Michel's wife and "companion," was part of every letter I received from him. Our friendship, he declared again and again, was a "luminous trinity," that united Jeanne and him and me and made us a "spiritual and emotional family." Jeanne reaffirmed this in her letters to me after Michel's death. "Even if we were never to see each other again," she wrote, "that marvelous message, *'Les Roses, Mademoiselle,'* . . . would remain a sign of union between us, . . . and every rose encountered would make me dream of you, of my faraway friend who is nevertheless so close to my thought."

Jeanne was an intelligent, shrewdly perceptive woman who was fiercely and lovingly protective of her husband and his work and acted as his gatekeeper. She considered herself to be (and undoubtedly was) less naively idealistic than Michel about the character and mo-

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tives of the procession of writers, painters, sculptors, puppeteers, actors, publishers, literary and theatrical agents, journalists, public officials, students, professors and the like, from different parts of Belgium and Europe, and from many other countries in the world, who wished to meet and interview the great author, see his inner sanctum, and seek professional rights and favors from it.

It was Jeanne de Ghelderode, as much as Michel, who admitted me into their universe. Out of a combination of intuition and practical sense, she trusted me. Because I was a sociologist, rather than a literary, theater, or media person, she reasoned, I was less likely to have self-interested, careerist reasons for wanting to know her husband. Like Michel, she responded positively to my "aura," and she shared his sense of mysterious familiarity with my "silhouette." She also knew that I saw her as far more than Michel's devoted spouse, helpmate, and housekeeper. It was apparent to me that she typed all his manuscripts. She was an important in-house critic of the various drafts of his plays and stories. She also influenced the decisions that he made about whether a play was ready to be published or performed, and to whom the rights to produce it ought to go. I discovered, too, that she was not merely the guardian and duster of the Ghelderodean salon but also the one who helped Michel to choose and arrange its *objets étranges*. My recognition of her role and her awareness of the way I perceived her reinforced our friendship.

It was with anxiety as well as expectancy, however, that we anticipated our first visit *à deux* since Michel's death. "Your great friend Michel will not be there, unhappily, to welcome you," Jeanne forewarned me. "Both of us . . . live with his memory, and . . . [our] friendship . . . is placed under [his] protection."

My taxi pulled up in front of 7, rue Lefrancq and departed. A note written in Jeanne's hand had been slipped into the Michel de Ghelderode nameplate on the big, green front door. "Gone for five minutes," it read. Almost instantly, Jeanne was standing beside me. We embraced, kissing each other three times on alternate cheeks, *à la Belge*. Jeanne wept silently.

Inside the house, we entered the salon, and seated ourselves in chairs near the small, round table where Michel wrote, leaving the carved, throne chair, with its crimson and gold church hangings, empty, ready for his entrance. "I have left things just as they were," said Jeanne, weeping quietly again. Neatly laid out on his writing table, in their customary place, were Michel's green blotter, his old brown spectacles, his pipe in its stand, a small sword letter opener, an antique brass scale for weighing letters, and, in a special cup, all his

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plumes—wooden penholders, fitted out with steel pen points, arranged like a painter's brushes. In one corner of the desk stood a tall crystal vase, filled with simple garden roses. A book about Hieronymous Bosch and his paintings was propped on a nearby couch. A very large photographic portrait of Michel, that I had not seen before, had been placed in the center of the mantelpiece.

"I am not '*croyante*' or '*pratiquante*,' " Jeanne said, referring to the fact that she was not a believing, practicing Catholic. "I was baptized and had my First Communion," she continued, "but though I tried, I was never able to become '*croyante*.' " And yet, since Michel had died, she confessed, she had the sense of being "doubly strong," as though Michel's spirit had entered into her.

Jeanne felt his continuing presence in the apartment, and so did I. She had opened the shutters on the front windows of the salon and drawn back the curtains on the glass doors that framed the apartment's small, inner garden. An enchanted garden, Michel called it, and he wove it into some of his tales and plays. On this exceptionally lovely summer day, it was flooded with sunlight, very green, and full of roses. The sun shone through the windows and panes of the French doors, illuminating the apartment as if an invisible stage director had turned a theatrical spotlight upon it. The light dispelled all the shadows in the house. It warmed the yellows, pinks, and reds of the roses in the crystal vase on the writing table. The bright-eyed carousel horses looked newly painted. The sequins on the red satin suit of the Gentleman-Devil puppet shimmered. The mantelpiece mirror gleamed. The crystal chandeliers sparkled. The amethyst necklace worn by one of the mannequins emitted a purple glow. And the paintings over the gold velvet settee were as radiant as a Flemish sky. Sunbeams fingered the green metal trunk filled with Michel's manuscripts and correspondence, and the old upright machine on which, for years, Jeanne had typed his manuscripts.

Jeanne smiled as she began to describe the visit she had received that morning from the notary. He admired the salon, Jeanne said, especially the religious objects in it, because he was a very pious Catholic. But, for that same reason, he did not understand why the crucifixes, the madonnas, the church candelabra, and the like were intermingled with masks, puppets, wooden horses, and semi-clothed mannequins. With a perfectly straight face, Jeanne explained to the notary that when the windows and shutters are closed, the house starts to smell like an old church, and so in order to offset this odor, the other objects in the salon are necessary. The notary listened respectfully to what he supposed was Jeanne's serious response, but he was clearly perplexed.

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A visit that Jeanne thought would be comparable in its own way, and to which she was definitely not looking forward, she said, was the one she expected the assessors to make at the end of the year. They will come to estimate the value of all the furnishings and possessions in the house, in connection with the taxes that must be levied on them, she told me. How will the assessors appraise the objects in this salon, I wondered silently. What money value will they affix to the long-legged mannequin whom Michel named "Hamlet," with her scarlet lips and nails, bare breasts, a crown atop her lavender-tinted wig, and a sword hanging from the satin poncho that she wears? Or to Borax, the carousel horse, and Sire Mephistopheles, the "*Grand Seigneur*" Devil puppet?

Jeanne filled the afternoon and evening that we spent together with anecdotes and stories about Michel. He was cared for by three physicians, she recounted: one from Brussels, one from Ghent, and one from Bruges. They were all Flemish and Catholic. One of these physicians felt that it was important for Michel to see a priest during the last days of his illness. He asked a particular priest to visit Michel, but, Jeanne told me, this "wonderful priest" declined to do so. "Michel will find his way to Paradise by himself," the priest stated with conviction. Jeanne and Michel agreed that "the priest who never came to the house" was a "truly religious man."

Jeanne reminisced about her first meeting with Michel, their courtship, wedding, and honeymoon. They met when the two of them were working for the same stationer—she in the publicity department, he in school supplies. It was the beginning of the academic year, and the store was filled with children and their mothers coming to buy supplies for classes. All the employees of the firm were asked to help with the long line of customers. Jeanne and Michel were seated at the same table, dispensing merchandise and collecting cash. He was Adhémar Martens then, and in the course of the remarks they exchanged in the midst of the sales, Michel/Adhémar discovered that Jeanne had gone to school with his sister, Germaine Martens. Later, he asked Jeanne to type a tale for him, telling her that he was the literary executor for the works of a young author-friend who had recently died. The story was signed, "Michel de Ghelderode." Jeanne typed the manuscript, knowing full well that it was written by Adhémar Martens, because its style was so similar to the way that he spoke. "What do you think of it?" he asked her when she returned the typed story to him. "Not bad," she replied. "Not bad?" he responded with some indignation. "The boy has talent!"

Vowing to each other that they would never marry, Jeanne and Michel began going out together. Jeanne continued to type his manu-

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scripts. She was also invited to his Saturday soirées. At the first of these evenings that she attended, she was greeted at the front door of the house by Michel, who was wearing a robe of some kind and whose hair, she said, was longer than mine. Michel was holding a candlestick in his hand. He led her up the staircase to the attic of the house where he had a bedroom-studio. There, by candlelight, with huge shadows flickering on the walls, Michel received his friends on Saturday nights. Jeanne was startled when she noticed that the pile of coats that had been thrown on the bed by the guests had begun to move with a strange, rocking motion. And then, from under the pile, a tiny dog, with a red face, emerged. It was Michel's dog!—one of the only "possessions" with which he entered marriage, she added.

Jeanne and Michel were married in a civil ceremony that lasted only a few minutes. She wore a very pretty black dress for the occasion, she said, and they went to Paris for their honeymoon, using the money that Michel had received from his first literary prize.

With a burst of candor, Jeanne told me that she knew her husband's faults well. He was "very influenceable," she said, and, during a certain period of his life, he drank too much in local cafés with writer, artist, and actor friends. At a critical point in their marriage, she had a very serious, "severe" discussion with Michel about the problem, particularly about the adverse way that it was affecting his writing. After that conversation, Jeanne alleged, Michel stopped drinking, and the problem never occurred again.

As Jeanne recalled past events, I learned more about Michel's parents. His mother, she told me, like her own father, was a "child of love," born out of wedlock. Michel's father, the son of a "good family" from Louvain, was the principal clerk at the General Archives of Belgium. It was he who introduced Michel to "parchments, . . . faded writings, . . . great wax [and] metal seals," and antique objects; and like his father, Michel was employed for many years as an archivist (in the Communal Hall [Hôtel Communal] in the Brussels commune of Schaarbeek). Despite what they had in common in this regard, father and son "did not have a good understanding," Jeanne said. A major source of conflict between them was that Michel's father expected him to choose a "respectable" and "safe" occupation—preferably one in the civil service.

It was Michel's mother, Jeanne continued, from whom he received the "secret life" out of which he became a writer. She "grew up in a convent in Louvain [Michel wrote about his mother], and there she was taught the life of the saints. . . . She knew liturgical chant, spoke ecclesiastical Latin, and believed in the devil whom, she said, she had seen many a time. . . . She was rich in proverbs, in forgotten songs, . . .

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in ancient legends, . . . and in haunted stories," which she told "wonderfully well." Michel claimed that he was her one and only listener. Neither his siblings nor his father was interested in her tales. There was always something "celestial" about her face, Jeanne mused, her eyes filling with tears as she spoke of her mother-in-law.

Just before Jeanne and I had lunch together, the Ghelderodes' *femme de journée*, Madame Lambert, dropped by for a short visit. She had worked for Jeanne and Michel for more than thirty years, helping with the cleaning, laundry, and other chores around the house. They first met when she was the concièrge in the house where they lived before moving to 71, rue Lefrancq. In her earlier years, she was a singer and a dancer in the Flemish Art Theatre.

I had never been impressed with Madame Lambert's housekeeping abilities. When I watched her at work on previous visits, it seemed to me that there was no particular order in which she did things and that she spent quite a bit of time leaning dreamily on her mop, staring into space with a dust cloth clutched in her hand, or chatting animatedly with Jeanne and Michel—who always respectfully addressed her as *Madame* Lambert. Jeanne told me that Madame Lambert was Michel's confidante during the last days of his illness. He knew that he was dying, he said to Madame Lambert, and he asked her to look out for Jeanne. Artistically, as well as humanly, Madame Lambert fit into the décor and atmosphere of the Ghelderode house. With her tousled blonde hair drawn into a knot at the top of her head, her expressive light blue eyes, her long, upturned nose like those you see on carved wooden folk dolls, in the rumpled, shapeless dress, and huge carpet slippers that she donned for cleaning, she always gave me the impression of a comedienne, playacting the role of a servant or of a living, giant-sized marionette!

Jeanne had prepared a special lunch for me of Belgian dishes: small, fresh tomatoes, stuffed with tiny shrimp (*crevettes*), stewed rabbit, new potatoes, *petits pois*, a choice of cheeses, and for dessert a mixture of fresh strawberries, raspberries, and red currants (*groseilles*), accompanied by a glass of red wine, and a cup of her good, strong coffee. Over the meal, she discussed the problems that she was encountering to obtain permission for Michel to be buried in the Laeken cemetery. It was his ardent wish to join the renowned artists, war heroes, and noblemen who were interred in what he called this "necropolis," near the Royal Palace and Cathedral of Laeken, and the bronze cast of one of his favorite statues, Auguste Rodin's *Le Penseur*. Technical, bureaucratic, and political considerations were delaying the decision about whether the honor of being buried on the "Avenue of Artists" of this national cemetery would be accorded Ghel-

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derode and his literary works. Meanwhile, his coffin remained on the Laeken cemetery grounds, in what Jeanne referred to as a "*cave d'attente,*" and the Belgian association of "The Friends of Michel de Ghelderode" was launching a public drive to collect funds to erect a special tombstone for him. (Michel de Ghelderode was finally buried in Laeken cemetery on December 6, 1964.)

After lunch, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, Jeanne's brother, Gérard, and his wife, Josette, came for the kind of long visit that they had been making at least once a week (usually Sunday) to Jeanne and Michel for many years. In appearance and manner, Gérard was a classical, almost vaudevillean "*Bruxellois/Brusselaar.*" He was a huge, rotund man, with a protruding stomach. His tremendous trousers were pulled all the way up to his chest and held there with suspenders; and he wore a very large, floridly printed tie. He was a jolly, fun-loving man, who loved good stories and jokes, food and drink, and the ladies: a *bon vivant, raconteur,* and *rigoleur* rolled into one. He held a minor civil service position in Brussels, from which he was now retired. He was a gifted amateur photographer, who had taken many outstanding artistic photos of Michel and the objects of his theater and salon. He was also an adroit practitioner of some of the more underground activities in Belgian community life. During World War II and the German Occupation, for example, he used both his photographic and forgery skills to produce false identity cards for endangered citizens, among them many Brussels Jews. He was not an educated man, but both Jeanne and Michel always considered him to be very intelligent, with a great deal of unused and, to some extent, misdirected talent. When I had heard them talk about Gérard in the past, they implied that what they regarded as the narrow, rather vacuous way in which he lived was largely attributable to Josette.

Josette was a "very proper woman," to use Jeanne's phrase, with perfectly set, graying hair, a rather doll-like pretty face, and an ample, tightly corseted, Rubensian body. She spoke in a singsong voice, with a thick Brussels accent like that of her husband. Jeanne said she was a compulsive housekeeper who spent hours every day dusting and mopping. She doted on Poupée, the little white fluff of a dog she and Gérard owned, whom she dressed up each day with a different colored ribbon.

Gérard and Josette's visit took place in the framework of an established routine. Josette unfolded a special cover that she had brought with her, spread it out on Jeanne's bed, and placed Poupée on it. The dog curled up comfortably and promptly went to sleep. Gérard and Josette chatted with Jeanne and me, watched some television, and, at

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an appointed time, unwrapped the cold cuts and sandwich supper that they had brought with them, and ate it on the kitchen table, while Poupée lapped up milk from a dish and nibbled on bits of chocolate. At about 10:00 P.M. they packed up all their belongings and their little dog and bid an affectionate farewell to Jeanne and me.

My visit with Jeanne did not end until very late in the evening. She was not accustomed to sleeping much during the night, because that is when Michel did most of his writing. We continued to converse, and I moved about the house with her as she made her rounds to put things back in their proper places and to touch some of the objects. For the first time I touched them, too, patting Borax's head and daring to shake the hand of the Gentleman-Devil puppet as if he were an old friend.

We called for a taxi. As Jeanne and I stood together in the doorway of 71, rue Lefrancq, waiting for the cab to come down the empty, silent street, both of us smelled roses.

Return to Rue Lefrancq: July 30, 1987

I am leaving Belgium the day after tomorrow. During the brief interlude of sunshine that appeared this afternoon, I made my first trip to 71, rue Lefrancq in years, to the house in the Brussels commune of Schaarbeek where Michel and Jeanne de Ghelderode lived in 1961, when I first met them.

Riding in the taxi, into the Schaarbeek world that exists behind the peeling and battered basilica of the Eglise Sainte Marie, I felt the same stirrings that I experienced when Michel and Jeanne were alive and I was approaching their house for a visit. Since that time, Schaarbeek has become a district that is inhabited principally by North Africans. I have been told that they tried, but did not succeed, in having the domed Eglise Sainte Marie converted into a mosque.

The streets were quiet at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. An occasional North African woman passed by, dressed in an ankle-length robe, her head covered in the Islamic way. A few children were playing summer games on the sidewalks. When I reached rue Lefrancq, it was totally devoid of people, and very still.

The windows of the Ghelderodes' ground-floor apartment were covered with green shutters, as they always were. And on the left side of the big green entrance door, attached to the faded brick wall, there is a white stone memorial plaque. "On April 1, 1962, Michel de Ghelderode died here," the plaque says in both French and Flemish. At the bottom, it reads, "*Les Amis de Michel de Ghelderode*" (The Friends of Michel de Ghelderode), exclusively in French. There is no mention of Jeanne.

On that momentarily sunny street, filled with the kind of light that Michel used to arrange for my visits, I sensed his presence. The carousel horses, the madonnas, the mannequins, the marionettes, the masks, the swords, the sea-shells, the walls of eloquent paintings, and the strange, secret garden might still be there, I felt, behind the green shutters. The enigmatic roses, too.

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Extended Sonnet

ALICIA OSTRIKER

> *Let me not to the marriage of true minds*
> *admit impediments. Love is not love*
> *which alters when it alteration finds.*
> —William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 116"

Love is not love that likes another's pain
Or its own suffering either. It has a sweet
Tooth but for merriment, the chapel stone
Of love feels cool and smooth to naked feet
That walk around in it under the moon
And curl together listening to owls
Call and call. They giggle in
Their cupped palms, for they are only children—
This ruin has no roof, it is so old,
The midnight wind is full of oranges.
Kennst du das land?
Past the hedgerow a hill
Flattens toward the moist acre of father's hand
Where we trotted and sniffed, before the furrows turned
To a checkbook and shot glass,
Before it bit its nails to the cuticle—
Love might revoke our exile from that ground.

✪ ALICIA OSTRIKER is a poet and critic, whose most recent volume of poems is *Green Age.* Her forthcoming book of biblical re-readings is called *The Nakedness of the Fathers.*

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LETTER FROM FRANCE

Nationalism and the Politics of Resentment

EUGEN WEBER

The French political landscape has seen radical changes during the last decade. Against a background of widespread unemployment, jarring insecurity and unpopular immigration, one great political force—the Communist party—has suffered catastrophic decline, another star has risen to outshine it: the right-wing National Front. The Communist free fall is old stuff now. The apparently sudden breakthrough of the Nationalists calls for more comment.

A national survey made in 1987 shows that about a third of Frontist sympathizers came from the Left (more than 5 percent from the Communist party), but also that a significant minority rejected the traditional categories of Left and Right, and large majorities expressed hostility to the social and political establishment. Interviews with supporters elicited calls for cleaner politics (a sixty-five-year-old retired social worker), opposition to the "bourgeois politics" of the conservative Giscard d'Estaing (a twenty-five-year-old pharmacy student), affirmation of "French values" (a retired soldier), scorn of President Mitterand's broken promises (a thirty-five-year-old actor), reference to the use of votes used as sticks to beat politicians (a twenty-five-year-old student), aversion to "problems that are hidden and buried underground" (a twenty-year-old political science student). "All politicians are the same, Left or Right," declared a sixty-year-old shopkeeper. "Always a lot of words, a lot of principles, but what do people see? The concrete. They see prices rising, insecurity, unemployment . . . and one day people get sick to see that nothing is done, nothing concrete. Le Pen [the leader of the National Front], him, he has character."

Some formulas recur endlessly: *France d'abord, les Français d'abord, la France aux Français.* The insistent repetition, the ready acceptance of such slogans as France First and France for the French suggest that national identity is the kernel of National Front discourse, national preference the core of its appeal, national entity the essence of its platform of national regeneration and revival. The slogans imply rejection of what is non-national, foreign, alien, and impure; but also they imply attachment to France, the cult of its past, confidence in its value and its values, affirmation of an enduring originality. They embody a dichotomy of inclusion and exclusion, inclusiveness based on exclusiveness, neither really new, but partly forgotten in the aftermath of Vichy and of the Algerian War.

So Nationalism has returned to public life in France, not as a political torrent, but as a goad: "Le Pen is a negative choice [for me]," declares a thirty-two-year-old legal worker. "I think above all that he will force the others to react." And a retired officer of the gendarmerie remarks: "I don't want to see him elected. . . . What I want is for the election to show that a lot of people think there are important problems, and that those who run the country have to try to solve them if they don't want to be penalized." The Nationalist agenda is heavy with negative designs.

Students of nationalism have featured its bellicose aspects more faithfully than its recusant, protesting tone. French experience helps modify this impression. It reminds us that aggressiveness is shaped by defensiveness, and that nationalism perceives itself more

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sinned against than sinning. Its adversarial stance is that of the injured party. Resentful discontent with things as they should not be helps to explain sporadic Nationalist flare-ups—the flash-in-the-pan success of movements like the National Front—but also their marginality. In 1882, speaking at the Sorbonne in Paris, Ernest Renan delivered a lecture, still read and quoted today, about what makes a nation. "Common glories in the past," was the gist of Renan's message. "A common will in the present; having done great things together and wanting to do more, these are the essential conditions of a People." But another passage of the same lecture is less well remembered: the one where he calls forgetfulness an essential factor in making and maintaining a nation. The French have done great things in the past, and the memory of past glories is crucial to present national identity and pride. But they have also done terrible things to one another, and the memory of the Wars of Religion, of the Terror, of the Commune, of the Dreyfus Affair, and of Vichy rises like bile in their throats, embittering every crisis, envenoming every debate.

Most serious French political conflicts, for the past two centuries and more, have been wars of religion, in which clashes of interest, expectations, and aspirations adopt the terminology of contending faiths to recall past injuries and offenses, exacerbate present disputes, and elaborate recrimination. No marriage can last very long (no good marriage) if past grievances are kept alive from year to year, from decade to decade, and served up over and over to stoke present grievances and bitterness. But the very force of the attachment of the French to their history prevents forgetfulness, keeps memories alive, revives those divisive prejudices and stereotypes that are essential components of the love-hate relationship in which the French seem condemned to live.

Nationalism, which I shall shortly define, is part of the store of stereotypes into which modern societies dip in moments of stress. As in a family quarrel, minor issues or major disagreements are seldom debated in present context only, but rather they are debated in historical perspective. And, as in family quarrels again, dissension evokes ritual reaffirmations of unity, *in illo tempore*, assertions of coherence and harmony ("if only . . . ") that contradict the incoherence and confrontation of everyday experience. On the national plane (but it could as easily be a party conference or a department meeting), precisely because divisions destabilize, a common denominator is crucial. Precisely because interests are not common but diverse, a higher interest has to be affirmed—the interest of France, one and indivisible.

France has been a political and legal entity for a very long time: a gesellschaft. It yearns to be a gemeinschaft—an affective community, a family and not a conglomerate. From Jules Michelet through Ernest Lavisse, Maurice Barrès, Charles Péguy, and Charles de Gaulle, lovers of France have sung this yearning as if they were troubadours, presenting the spats and quakes of French history as occasions for further bonding. The Nationalists sing louder, they clamor, holler, stamp their feet, as if shrillness can muffle discord rather than add to it. One reason for the stridency of their insistence is that nations, as Professor Benedict Anderson put it in an inspired title, are imaginary communities—much more imaginary than families, to which they claim resemblance; hence they have to be affirmed and reaffirmed, as they have been since the eighteenth century, when nationhood, and nationalism in the modern sense, were forged.

The first appearance of *nationalism* as an exaggeration of national sentiment cannot be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* or in *Webster's*. It comes in France in 1798 and is recognized by French dictionaries as an exaltation that goes with xenophobia, with exclusive and isolationist insistence on national identity, welfare, survival. By 1830, when Nicolas Chauvin had lent his name to the fanatical and bellicose variant that we call chauvinism, the noun had spawned another noun to represent the doctrine and an adjective used to describe the doctrinaires of nationalism: *nationalist*. But Pierre Larousse's dictionary of 1868 still cites the words as neologisms.

This nationalism of nationalists was more than patriotism, and it was more than the national patriotism born in the eighteenth century with the French Revolution, which was simply a large-scale extension of patriotism. Patriotism is a natural sentiment: love of your fatherland, the *patria* (literally the land of your fathers), meaning village, neighborhood, hometown—something easy to know and easy to conceive because familiar and limited. Na-

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tional patriotism is wider in scope, more encompassing, and more demanding because it is more abstract. It does not come naturally: it has to be taught, it has to be learned.

The fellowship you feel with people you grew up with, the attachment you feel to streets or fields you trod for a long time, has to be transferred from visible, sensible entities to an invisible abstraction. You are asked to identify with something you don't really know: contribute to it, pay taxes to it, lay down your life for it. This does not come naturally; it has to be inculcated. So national patriotism is didactic, insistent, strident, and has a lot to do with definitions of who belongs to the national community and who does not—questions that do not arise at the local level, but that can be crucial at the national one where nothing is obvious or evident until someone has defined it.

As this process of national definition develops, a rival ideology rises to challenge it. The contending creed claims that reality lies not in the nation but in social class, because the nation does not represent our true solidarity or identity. Fundamental fellowship is based on economic relations, and the future lies not with national definition and assertion, but in the definition and assertion of relations to work, to wealth, to means of production. Specifically, working folk who are exploited, oppressed, and deprived have only one thing in common with neighbors who exploit and oppress them: not nationhood, but conflict.

This kind of thinking represents a dangerous challenge to national unity, dangerous because national unity is crucial in a world of nation-eat-nation. And to counter divisive class conflict, patriots develop organic arguments that have been around for a long time. The nation is a body, a plant, a unit, all parts of which flourish and decay together. Let a branch begin to perish, let a limb become gangrenous, and the whole organism is in trouble. So collective well-being is crucial, and the social justice that is a component of collective well-being is crucial, because without them the national entity weakens and rots.

Reality, hence, is not civil conflict but foreign threat. Cohesion and unity are crucial against foreign threat, and these must be achieved by some form of national collectivism. That is the essence of popular nationalism or national populism.

All this is theory, and theorizing interests few people as long as the political class remains limited in numbers, which it did until the end of the nineteenth century. Most of the time, most people just tend to their affairs. But in times of crisis they pay attention, and that's when nationalism is formulated and when it flourishes. National*ism* is what we call the acute form of national patriotism: more xenophobic, more chauvinistic, more exclusivist and strident than the original, because it is, or claims to be, about the nation under siege, the nation threatened by outside foes and sapped on the inside by parasites, betrayed by traitors. With the nation in crisis, beset by self-destructiveness and self-doubt, real or alleged, nationalism is about mobilizing, arming, and bending energies to defend national entity and national identity against these threats. Where patriotism was about attachment, and possibly integration, nationalism is about fear. It identifies, but it also excludes: it identifies in order to exclude.

This is when the business of defining who belongs and who does not becomes crucial; this is when traitors and potential traitors to the nation have to be identified, located, denounced, whether they are corruptors or corruptible, hence corrupt. In Protestant societies, the foe may be Catholic. In Catholic societies they are often Protestants and their allies the Freemasons. But in all societies they include foreigners; and that is where the Jews come in, who, in Christian cultures, are resident aliens par excellence.

Citizens have to be persuaded of the danger they face, and the community faces, if prompt defensive action is not taken to stifle internal threats, purge agents of corruption and decay, and eliminate the disunity that weakens and incapacitates. Those citizens who cannot be persuaded, converted, convinced, or enlisted have to be forced to shape up for their own good and for that of their fellows—or else they have to be eliminated as objective collaborators of the alien threat. There is no necessary recourse to racist discourse, because nationalism can be cultural—assimilationist, integrationist; but racism is a possible extension of such thinking, especially logical in a context of Social Darwinism, in which the nation-state is conceived as a racial entity.

The kind of people who might preach such views are around all the time in every society: monomaniacs, true believers, radicals of one

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sort or another. Their formulas change according to local tradition, of course; but their influence most of the time is minimal at best, moderate at worst. They come into their own only when things go badly: at times of danger, defeat, serious economic dislocation, or when a significant portion of the public comes to look for drastic solutions and drastic action that will end their torments.

Crisis by itself is not enough: established authorities and traditional solutions must be discredited. The beleaguered citizenry must believe that the professionals of politics cannot solve the problems facing them, that so-called leaders do not lead because they cannot recognize what the problems are, that men long trusted by the public cannot or will not admit looming predicaments, will not listen to the voice of public distress. While the people struggles, its representatives and its government bend their attention to sterile, counterproductive, or self-serving ends.

French history records quite a few occasions when crisis and alleged indifference of ruling elites to the true cause of crisis converged with explosive results: 1789, 1830, 1848 are only the better known. Philip Nord's book *The Politics of Resentment,* about the 1880s and 1890s, concerns those years when crisis and misdoubt came together with particular acrimony. These were times when anxiety about national decline (demographic and international), economic crisis, religious struggle, social turbulence, and serious discredit of fragile national institutions and political personnel converged; these were times when contemporary French nationalism was born, in a moment when problems seemed especially urgent, discontent especially widespread, and the political class especially inept.

For Charles Maurras, who was present at the beginning, "the nationalist formula is almost born wholly out of Dreyfus." Maurras should know. But for me, Boulangism in the 1880s, *then* anti-Dreyfusism in the 1890s, represented a response that rejected the republican principles of 1789 and 1879—rationalism, individualism, materialism, liberalism, parliamentary democracy, now coupled with trouble and faction—and asserted the superior efficacy of values and moralities that alone could save the nation and the superior good of that nation which is a body indivisible into parties, factions, ideologies, interests, or individuals, but subject to its own vital laws. Such a nation's survival depended on re-establishing cohesion and contact with the vital sources of energy to be found in *la terre et les morts*.

That was when men appeared who articulated the message of frustration and exasperation, resentment and protest, within parliamentary democracy and against it. And whereas, until that time, such men would have been radicals of the Left, they were henceforth to be radicals of the Right: the forerunners of twentieth-century fascism. Nor was it insignificant that the Nationalist message was formulated in a parliamentary republic that had moved very close to democracy. Without parliamentary democracy you do not need nationalism or proto-fascism, because you operate within an authoritarian regime, or a dictatorship, or a clan, or a tribe; because debate is nonexistent or restricted; because conflicts are channeled and resolved according to tradition, force, authority, miracle, or what have you. The violent protest that first Nationalist, then Fascist-style movements reflect and amplify is a confutation, a confrontation, of parliamentary politics; it represents the active contradiction of parliaments, elections, open give-and-take. In other words, Nationalists (and after Nationalists, Fascists) would not be there if a particular system of parliamentary democracy did not exist to invite confutation and contradiction.

In parliamentary democracies, electoral politics have sublimated violence by shifting it from streets and barricades to election campaigns and polling booths. Congress, Parliament, and National Assembly have organized conflict through political parties and party politics. But parliaments and assemblies operating under the scrutiny of a relatively free press give the impression of inefficiency and corruption. We know that inefficiency, or apparent inefficiency, is caused by conflict; and conflict is there by a constitutional design that wants checks and balances, that encourages the activity of a lot of representatives with different and sometimes irreconcilable agendas, and a lot of actors pursuing a variety of goals, only some of which can be expected to reach resolution. But it is the impression of conflict, confrontation, logrolling, and lack of resolution that dominates; and that impression becomes crucial and disaffecting in a crisis, when basic concerns are at stake.

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When it comes to basic concerns, each has his own agenda which may turn about religion or race, schools, taxes, or potholes in the streets. But I would argue that the most basic of basic concerns are about work and making a living, about security of person and property, about the stability in public and private life that allows one to plan for the day after tomorrow, and not just from day to day. Societies can fight about ideological or moral issues, town planning or schools, but these remain superficial problems unless and until the great priorities are affected. When they are, they aggravate and sharpen every other disagreement around.

We can see this happen before the First World War, when France faced the traumas of modernization, secularization, urbanization, and national integration. We see it happen after the war, and not in France alone, but also in societies where frustration is rife, unemployment threatening, inflation soaring, national pride suffering, and discredited politicians cannot cope with insoluble problems. Italy and Germany come to mind at once, and we recoil at the paroxysms of irredentism and xenophobia associated with them. But even exorbitant nationalism is not wholly repulsive. In Italy, fascism offered national unity and discipline to replace indignity, disorganization, endemic disorder. Mussolini making trains run on time was not as laughable as patronizing Westerners pretended. In Germany, meanwhile, National Socialism combined the great battle cries of a century past: nationalism and socialism. It talked about organic wholeness and integrity; it promised to restore employment, dignity, and order; and, for a few years, it seemed to deliver on its promises.

Amidst institutional and economic disarray, with the established order discredited and breaking down, new leaders appear who reject traditional politics—democratic institutions, freedom of individuals, and freedom of the press to criticize, which only muddles and misleads an innocent public—and these new leaders claim to hear, interpret, and express the true voice of the nation, the true national will. They concentrate on insoluble problems, they preach solutions that would be unthinkable in free societies, they demand radical change and radical action to bring change about because—as the Tupamaros used to say—"Words divide, action unites." And lots of people listen to these unfamiliar figures because lots of people feel that they have nothing to lose: that anything would be better than what they're going through. And that is how fascism and movements like it find a following.

In societies such as France, where crisis is less violent, where depression is less acute and suffering less widespread, Fascist-style movements in the nationalist tradition don't get far: they rise when inflation or unemployment rise, they deflate when inflation and unemployment fall.

France after the First World War was not humiliated; it had no territorial claims; its inflation in the 1920s was solved by conservative measures; its unemployment in the 1930s was lower than in other countries. There were not enough desperate people, there were not enough ruined people, and French Fascist movements never really caught on. Britain, too—where unemployment surged sooner and rose higher than in France—managed to contain protest within the two- or three-party system, managed to contain despair with unemployment payments, and managed an industrial recovery that began to resorb unemployment in the mid-1930s. British fascism never went anywhere. It is not that the British or the French were particularly virtuous, but that their parliamentary democracies functioned less badly in crisis, appeared less clumsy, unresponsive, and inefficient than those of more comfortless societies.

Now transfer this argument to the last thirty or forty years, to the question of nationalism or neo-fascism in the Fourth and Fifth Republics and to the fact that—contrary to the impression one might derive from media that sell their product by sensationalizing everything—movements of this sort do not have much of a rise to chronicle so far.

Remember that the radical, nationalist Right is the mushroom of crisis. It provides references and inspiration when things go badly. But things have to go very badly; and, as long as post–Second World War Europe continued to be prosperous, no crisis was acute enough or lasting enough to spur native nationalism into a serious neo-fascist movement. One finds factions and grouplets of the ilk in every Western democracy, most of them nostalgic, all of them marginal. But one does not find any movement gathering support beyond the nutty fringe until the economic crisis of

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the 1980s in France and the economic crisis of the 1990s in Germany stimulate support for movements of the far Right, related in each case to high unemployment coincident with high immigration.

That's the gist of it. But, of course, specific local situations, specific local explanations, are more complex. In France nowadays one begins with a charismatic leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, who attracts an audience even among opponents. In January 1988, for example, the daily *Libération* reported a Communist demonstration against Le Pen's appearing on television that evening. When the demonstration broke up, people were heard talking about hurrying home to watch the show they condemned: "On a juste le temps d'aller le voir à la télé."

So you have Le Pen, as the now-familiar Fascist recipe demands. You have rising unemployment, rising numbers of immigrants, and the coming to power in 1981 of a coalition of Socialists and Communists that revives fears of menace from the Left (the radical Right is never so weak as when the moderate Right is in power). In 1981, the extreme Right got 0.4 percent of the national vote; three years later it got over 11 percent. One technical reason for this was that François Mitterand's Socialists decided that it would be good political tactics to introduce proportional representation, which would scatter the Right and make its return to power more difficult. But even in the presidential elections of 1988, Le Pen attracted 14.4 percent of the electoral vote.

I believe that was because, in the 1980s, as in the middle 1920s and 1930s, the system and the Establishment faced a crisis of credibility. In the 1980s and 1990s as in the 1920s and 1930s, national pride was affected, national identity could be said to be under threat, and a lot of people objected to burgeoning bureaucracy and swelling taxes. But beyond that most French feared for their jobs, if they had any, and for their personal security at home or in the streets. Many of these fears were ignored, while national leadership went on with politics as usual. The gap between an allegedly enlightened political class in parliament and in the media and a public opinion that could not make itself heard was growing wider. Le Pen and the National Front were the first to articulate, to formulate, anxieties, insecurities, resentments, and fears that the enlightened classes ignored, that acceptable discourse swept under the rug, that everyone who was anyone hoped would go away. But if stereotypes are self-reinforcing, the *bondieuseries* of political correctness can be self-defeating. Le Pen was going to show that there was more than one side to political correctness.

The National Front, as Le Pen refashioned it in the 1980s, was both anti-Communist and anti-conservative; it opposed egalitarianism and traditional elitism; it opposed technocracy, bureaucracy, fiscal oppression, the Establishment, and the political oligarchy. It sounded racist, but Le Pen soon realized that anti-Semitism had only marginal appeal, so racism was refocused on more immediately unpopular targets. The National Front's appeal was not exactly reactionary in the traditional sense of the term. Its force was that it embodied and articulated the diffuse dissatisfaction and protest welling up all around.

The hard core of the National Front is indeed anti-American and anti-Semitic and, in the Faurisson sense, revisionist in that it denies the Holocaust. Some Frontists are neo-Nazis, and some are integrist (i.e., fundamentalist) Catholics, and there are veterans of collaboration, of Vichy, of stick-in-the-mud Algerian colonialism. But the people who vote for the National Front, and the many more people who sympathize with a lot it has to say, do not consider themselves to stand on the extreme Right: they are resentful, and they are reactionary in the sense that they react against what they see around them; and the votes they cast are protest votes.

So governments discredited by enduring economic distress and disarray, incriminated by failure and by failure to listen, evoke protest. And present protest picks up the slogans and the stereotypes of protest past: anti-parliamentarism that denounces parliament as inefficient and corrupt, xenophobia that denounces lax immigration policy as a menace to the economy, but also to national identity and culture. The important thing about such criticism is that it is warranted on the face of it: that political corruption fills the papers and literally even poisons French blood (a powerful image in Social Darwinist terms); that 5 million foreigners and foreign-born out of 55 million is a lot, especially when many of them look different and worship in different ways. And it does not matter if the aliens fill jobs the natives do not want, because, with unemploy-

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ment above 12 percent, explanations are not as effective as accusations.

The interesting thing in the circumstances is not so much the rise of the National Front in France as its stabilization at a low level: the reluctance of the vast majority to find in the National Front a solution for the country's problems. And that is because the problems are not so acute as to call for radical solutions. Le Pen has the sense to understand this. His discourse includes all the stereotypes of the radical Right, but he is willing, as Maurras was willing, to use "all means, *including* legal ones." So he claims to accept parliament, democratic politics, and the verdict of elections. He is not militaristic, he has nothing to be irredentist about, even his nationalism is diluted by Europeanism. Le Pen does not exploit a leader cult; above all, he hasn't got communism, he hasn't got a national enemy, and, as long as the economy holds, he hasn't got a real crisis to exploit. Without that he's stuck.

What is left of his message is the echo of widespread resentment; and his politics, like those of the 1880s, the 1890s, the 1920s, and the 1930s, are the politics of resentment. In 1983, when he set up the National Front, he denounced the economic failure of the Socialists in power, and, God knows, he had something to denounce. In 1993, he denounced unbridled immigration. And, each time, he represented a real, popular groundswell of opinion. What the successes, the very limited successes of his Front illustrate is the importance of listening to the public. When responsible mainstream politicians dismissed public concern about immigration as not politically correct, they left the issue to the Nationalists, who picked it up and ran with it. As soon as the mainstream leaders recognized their error, they reacted: Mitterand said that immigration had passed the threshold of tolerance; Giscard warned against the immigrant invasion; Chirac complained about the noise and smell of immigrants. And the voters, reassured by these signals that someone was lending an ear at last, returned to their home parties.

Not all returned, of course. But then again, even dissatisfied protesters shied from the extremities of nationalism. Protest needs a home, but it may flee one that seems too rowdy. So, in the past two or three years, the protest vote has split almost evenly between National Front and Ecologists. Since no one in Western Europe is less green than the French, I take the Green vote to represent not only rejection of the established parties, Left and Right, but also avoidance of their radical enemies. The Green vote represents a protest vote that refuses the incumbents, but not the system that they represent, and that also refuses the enemies of the system.

Finally, one must point out the constancy of these politics of resentment: the resilience of a nationalist or radical Right that does not like the moderate Right, but does not think of itself as Fascist either. In 1902, at the height of their first success, Nationalists won about one-tenth of the seats in parliament; in 1906 about half of that. In the late 1930s, the Social French Party (PSF) of Colonel de la Rocque was getting 10 to 11 percent of the vote. De la Rocque died in a German concentration camp. In 1956, the men who ran on the Nationalist and anti-tax platform of Pierre Poujade (and who included a young candidate named Le Pen) got 11 percent of the votes cast. In 1986, the National Front got 10 percent of the national vote; in 1993 about 12 percent. So this current is part of the political landscape, and it represents types of temperament and dissatisfaction that will probably be with the French as long as they are free to express themselves, but that can only stoke the fires of something like fascism in very exceptional and unlikely circumstances.

Shortly before his death, Charles Maurras wrote that nothing is ever finished. Everything passes, he said, but everything returns. In this perspective of recurrent return, what we call neo-fascism, a nationalist calling up of spirits from the past, is a reminiscence both on the Right and among its opponents. The reality of what is denounced as neo-fascism today is the revolt of citizens in societies where they are supposed to be part of the sovereign power, yet are treated like stooges. Modern electoral politics prospered in the nineteenth century because they provided entertainment in times and places where entertainment was scarce, but also because of the attention they gave to ordinary folk, enhancing their sense of dignity and importance. When elected representatives began to forget this, first Nationalists, then Fascists stepped into the breach, offering both attention and entertainment. The National Front may provide similar services when ordinary politicians become too obsessed with

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their game to remember the paying public in the stands.

Albert Camus wrote that fascism is contempt, and that—conversely—every kind of contempt, when operative in politics, prepares or installs fascism. I assume that Camus was talking about Fascist or proto-Fascist contempt for others. What he may have missed is that the indifference, condescension, or sheer contempt of rulers for the ruled can just as easily stimulate a Fascist kind of reaction that offers attention and action, but that also offers a sense of dignity that supporters have missed, and that they find (vicariously or personally) in ceremonies, in rituals, and in the bonding provided by a creed that is both exciting and reassuring.

It says a lot for the stability and the recuperative powers of societies such as France that most people continue to reject such temptations. The nuts capture attention on a wave of widespread grievance and commercially motivated publicity. Recognize the grievance, cut the publicity, cajole the resentful, and the nuts will return to limbo, which is where they belong.

Cleanth Brooks

1906–1994

Contributor, THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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The *Schindler's List* Effect

MICHAEL ANDRÉ BERNSTEIN

Tact is the discrimination of differences.
—Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

There is little pleasure in being troubled by what so many have found deeply moving. For several months now, scarcely a day has gone by without a chorus of impassioned voices, recently augmented by New Jersey Senator Bill Bradley and California Governor Pete Wilson, publicly testifying to the profound impression Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* made on them personally, while insisting on the movie's educational value for our society as a whole. Skepticism about the entire phenomenon of attributing such edifying power to a Hollywood movie must seem simultaneously blinkered and ungenerous: blinkered since it is bound to be condemned as elitist snobbery, and ungenerous since what it hesitates to applaud is so earnestly intended to be both individually uplifting and communally responsible. But the earnestness of the movie's ambition, far from excusing its intellectual and moral blind spots, only makes these all the more disturbing. *Schindler's List* is not just an ambitious but flawed movie; it is a work that manipulates the emotions raised by the enormity of its historical theme in order to disguise the simplistic melodrama of its actual realization. The surprising thing, surely, is not that this film should demonstrate all the sentimental facileness of its director's other works, but that, when applied to the Holocaust, the inappropriateness of these same techniques should not have raised more widespread and serious misgivings.

Perhaps the most succinct way to register the kinds of qualms with which I left the movie theater is simply to ask why *Schindler's List* is so complicit with the Hollywood convention of showing catastrophe primarily from the point of view of the perpetrators. For long stretches, the film's energy derives chiefly from the battle between Oskar Schindler and Amon Goeth, the commandant of the Plaszów labor camp. The stakes of the contest are, of course, the lives of "their" Jews, who are depicted as a largely anonymous mass from whose midst an occasional figure emerges to show his individuality by the shuffling fervor of his gratitude for Schindler's aid. Repeatedly, *Schindler's List* seems to turn into an allegory about the nature of the German soul, with its "good" and "evil" aspects embodied by Schindler and Goeth, functioning as each other's symbolic double.

As though the film's commitment to high seriousness could be expressed only through the moral conventions of the Hollywood films of another era, throughout *Schindler's List* evil is directly connected with sexuality and physical pleasure. A contrast is regularly drawn between decadently carousing Nazis and starving Jews (whose lethal hunger Spielberg wisely omits trying to represent, no doubt because it is technically beyond the resources of even the most adroit makeup experts). And even Schind-

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ler's own enigmatic journey from cynical opportunist to heroic rescuer is portrayed as joined to a gradual renunciation of any sensual interests. As his concern for the Jews under his protection increases, Schindler stops the rampant womanizing and extravagant living that had marked his earlier existence and rejoins his wife in what is represented as an essentially asexual union. (Emilie Schindler's rather different recollection of her husband is conveniently set aside, both in the film and in Thomas Keneally's novel from which Spielberg's screenplay was adapted.) To underscore still further the movie's link between virtue and asceticism, the one Jew who is particularized at any length in the movie, Itzhak Stern, an accountant who becomes the agent of Schindler's moral awakening, is completely indifferent to everything carnal.

So intent is *Schindler's List* on its didactic simplifications that it can only show morality as always absolute and homogeneous. In the rarefied universe of the movie, there is no hint of the "gray zone" about which Primo Levi wrote with such lucidity, no awareness of the agonizing choices and ethically intolerable alternatives that Jews were compelled by their tormentors to confront moment by moment as part of staying alive in the camps. Desperate with hunger and fear or not, the Jews in Spielberg's account have to continue to help one another at every turn and without exception, because, in a film whose representation of good and evil is so simplistic, only by being completely pure can they function as appropriate objects of our sympathy.

But life finds it extraordinarily hard not to be on the side of whatever pulses with energy; and the passivity of the film's Jews and the increasing sentimentalization of Schindler have the curious effect of making Amon Goeth the most compelling figure in *Schindler's List.* Ralph Fiennes plays Goeth brilliantly (just as Liam Neeson plays Schindler himself, and Ben Kingsley plays Itzhak Stern), and what we might call the viewer's affective identification, the focus of his fascination and attention, is directed toward Goeth in much the same way as it fixes on Iago whenever he enters a scene in *Othello.* Moral lessons need moral density in order to move one at all, and it is the absence of that density that vitiates Spielberg's film in spite of, perhaps even as a direct result of, its zealous efforts to construct a morally unequivocal story.

It would be easy to put together a detailed catalogue of the film's most embarrassing moments, including lengthy set pieces like Schindler's virtual apotheosis as a modern Christ figure in his sermon to the awestruck Jews looking up at him from the Brinnlitz factory floor (a direct crib from every Hollywood sand-and-sandals epic, from *The Ten Commandments* and *Ben-Hur* to *Jesus Christ Superstar*), or the clumsy literalization of George Steiner's meditations on Nazism in the scene of an SS officer sitting down to play "either Mozart or Bach" in a room "cleansed" of its Jews only moments earlier during the savage annihilation of the Kraków ghetto. But such a catalogue would be curiously beside the point, if only because many of the film's passionate advocates have already noticed—and quickly excused—each of the lapses it contains. Virtually every laudatory discussion I have come across has been careful to register some criticism of the very scenes I have just mentioned, but without permitting that acknowledgment to temper its overall praise beyond the briefest of hesitations. For me, one of the most disturbing of all the film's effects is this readiness to suspend critical judgment, with its implicit premise that any work that aims to make accessible to a large audience even a portion of so crucial a story ought to be exempt from careful evaluation because of that intention.

Part of the general reluctance to think critically about *Schindler's List* arises, I suspect, because in the face of suffering on as great a scale as the Holocaust, there is a general freezing up of normal intellectual discriminations. Yet these moments of confrontation with the monstrous require more, not less, clarity and demand a greater measure, rather than an abdication, of the ability to concentrate on fundamental distinctions. If there is an elitist position in this whole discussion, I believe it is represented by those who recognize the film's evasions and simplifications but are willing to overlook them because of their hope that it will teach people about the Holocaust who otherwise would never take an interest in it. It is this kind of condescension, the conviction that while "we" may read Primo Levi or see Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* for our knowledge of the Holocaust, "they" could never be expected to do so, that seems to me deeply arro-

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gant. Hence, when as intelligent a reviewer as Bryan Cheyette celebrates *Schindler's List* in the *Times Literary Supplement* because it is "the best film on this subject within its particular set of conventions," the hollowness of such praise is especially demoralizing. "Its particular set of conventions" is precisely what makes it impossible for *Schindler's List* to succeed in any more than the most trivial of ways, and by now the triviality of those conventions has rippled outward from the film to debase the terms within which the Holocaust itself is discussed.

For the moment at least, the most audible public discourse on the fate of European Jewry under the Nazis is being framed by the context of Spielberg's movie. The worrisome question is how long this moment will last. There is a cultural version, as well as an economic one, of "Gresham's law": "bad money drives out good," and in the ways a society takes up and defines the issues that engage its attention, the success of an appealingly facile articulation can set to the side, or even silence altogether, more complex and troubling expressions. This is also why to speak about a "*Schindler's List* Effect" is by now perhaps more useful than to concentrate exclusively on the film. Among the most vertiginous of these effects is the way the Holocaust is currently at risk of being presented, if only in people's first exposure to the subject, chiefly as the factual "basis" for Steven Spielberg's movie. The Mallarméan boast that "everything in the world exists in order to end in a book" has reached an abject incarnation in the more contemporary notion that only what has been presented on screen can continue to have significance today, that for us either "everything in the world exists in order to end up in a popular movie" or it will lose its hold on our interest altogether. Aided in this by both Democratic and Republican political leaders, as well as by an eager contingent of high school teachers, Steven Spielberg has encouraged free, and often even mandatory, showings of his movie for students in ethnically mixed school districts throughout the country, because, in the filmmaker's words, "this is a story about tolerance and remembrance, and it is for everyone. . . . [It] represents racial hatred everywhere in the world." At present, there appears to be widespread official support for the assumption that screening a film about the horrors inflicted on European Jews will improve relations between African-Americans and Jews in this country, especially in urban high schools and universities.

Spielberg has insisted repeatedly that his movie is as pertinent to the Bosnian Muslims or African-Americans as it is to Jews. In an inconsequential sense, he is right, because in spite of all its scrupulous specificity in the matter of local props, settings, and details, *Schindler's List* is so conventional and formulaic at its imaginative core that it actually engages no real historical catastrophe—and hence excludes none either. This eagerness to interpret the Holocaust as a parable of universal suffering—when its very essence was a deliberate, systematic, and, if such a word can be permitted in this context, "principled" denial of even minimal humanity to those it condemned to genocidal extermination—bespeaks a characteristic American urge to find a redemptive meaning in every event. This is why, then, Spielberg decided to concentrate on a small group of Jews who survived and on the good German who aided them, rather than on all the millions who did not live and the millions of Germans and German sympathizers who did nothing to help.

Beyond the transparent grotesqueness of trying to extract an uplifting meaning from the Holocaust, the attempt to use it as a sort of emotional and moral object lesson to foster racial tolerance has been derisively challenged by many of those to whom these lessons are specifically directed. Although Castlemont High School in Oakland received the widest coverage in the national media, it is not the only school in which a showing of *Schindler's List* clearly did not lead to any rapprochement in its student body. Instead, it helped trigger a bitter controversy, as different ethnic groups competed over whose history had been more traumatic. After more than sixty Castlemont students who had been taken for a required viewing of *Schindler's List* (on Martin Luther King Day!) were ejected from the movie theater because they continued to talk and laugh throughout some especially brutal scenes, the predictable but still disheartening accusations of black anti-Semitism versus Jewish ignorance about the suffering of African-Americans reverberated throughout both groups.

The whole notion that whatever hostility and misunderstanding exists between two ethnic groups living in the United States today could be diffused by showing that one of them

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had, in another time and country, suffered catastrophic persecution, appears both psychologically and historically naïve, willfully so. In spite of such pious wishes, there is no reason whatsoever to assume that the sight of Jews being brutalized by the Nazis will do anything to change the ways in which American Jews are viewed today. Such a project testifies to only two things: the longing for quick and painless solutions to complicated social problems, and a radical confusion between the box-office success of a movie and its capacity to make people re-evaluate their prejudices.

Predictably enough, when Spielberg himself visited Castlemont High, he enthusiastically endorsed a new program instituted as a result of the controversy that followed the initial screening of *Schindler's List.* The title of the new course is "The Human Holocaust: The African-American Experience." Clearly, in a culture as wedded as ours to the notion that victimhood endows one with special claims and rights, the scramble to attain that designation for one's own interest group is as heated as any other race for legitimacy and power. But victimhood, as this conflict over ownership of the term *holocaust* makes clear, is not a fixed category, and there is something depressing in the clamor of competing voices to prove whose distress has been more persistent and devastating, and whose claims to compensatory rectification are therefore more worthy. But because any sense of identity as constituted primarily by victimization is an extraordinarily problematic basis for either an individual or a group to build upon, what we need to do is question the centrality of the category itself, not simply apply it with more ecumenical generosity.

At the level of its explicit didacticism, *Schindler's List* is deeply complicit with the sentimentalization of victimhood as a guarantor of inner nobility, while at the level of the affective identification that it triggers, the film is equally complicit with the fascination exercised upon our imagination by the spectacle of absolute evil and power. Yet there is no dialectic, no inner struggle between these two contradictory impulses in the film: they coexist effortlessly because each is represented entirely within the most familiar moviemaking conventions. Spielberg's real talent has been to use the Holocaust as a plausible backdrop so that he can invoke both of these conventions simultaneously for their emotional charge while seeming to offer us something morally probing and original.

In my local video store, there is now a shelf of films about both the Holocaust in particular and World War II in general. Its label reads, simply: "Videos in the Category of *Schindler's List.*" A small manifestation, no doubt, but one that seems to me an accurate gauge of the "*Schindler's List* Effect." Spielberg's movie does not merely, in Claude Lanzmann's devastating phrase, "fabricate archives," it is already beginning to affect the way our culture understands, historically orders, and teaches how the Holocaust should be remembered—and effects like these require a sharp-eyed and unembarrassed resistance.

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The Fabled Moe

NICHOLAS DAWIDOFF

Three years ago I caught my first glimpse of Moe Berg. I was reading an essay entitled "Pitcher and Catchers," which Berg wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1941, shortly after he'd retired as a member of the Boston Red Sox. I'd never heard of a baseball player who published essays, never mind one who buttressed his prose with Latin and French epigrams. And precious few writers could have described the pitcher Lefty Grove's transition from a young man with a blazing fastball to an older fellow who succeeded with cunning and guile the way Berg did. "With Montaigne," he wrote, "we conceive of Socrates in place of Alexander, of brain for brawn, wit for whip." I was fascinated. I became even more interested when I learned that Berg could speak several more languages besides Latin and French, and that, not long after the *Atlantic* published his essay, he became an intelligence agent. This polyglot ballplayer was a man of many unusual parts, I saw, and although I knew writing the life of a spy might be difficult, I set out to try. I signed on to write Moe Berg's biography.

Soon I had assembled a basic sketch of Berg's life. The child of Ukrainian immigrant Jews, he was born in a cold-water upper-Manhattan tenement and grew up in the apartment over his father's drugstore in a bustling middle-class Newark, New Jersey, neighborhood. He studied Latin, Greek, French, Spanish, Italian, German, and Sanskrit at Princeton, graduated near the top of the class of 1923, and also found time to lead the college's baseball team to a 21–4 record during his senior year. The day after his commencement in June, Berg became a member of the Brooklyn Dodgers. Three months later, he began using the five thousand dollars the Dodgers had paid him to finance a winter spent studying experimental phonetics and linguistics at the Sorbonne in Paris. By April, he was back in the United States on a train heading south for spring training with the Dodgers.

Berg's first few seasons in professional baseball were marked by erratic play. In part, this was because he was moonlighting as a law student at Columbia. He passed the New York State Bar and was hired by a respected—and stodgy—Manhattan firm, but the law was strictly off-season business for Berg. He loved baseball, and his skills were improving. Yet no sooner had the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* pronounced him "one of the coming catchers of the league" than in 1930 a severe knee injury limited his foot speed, his agility, and so his playing time.

The ballplayer's life of five-hour workdays, businessmen's hotels, and first-class rail travel appealed to Berg, however, and he refused to give it up. By major-league standards, his schooling was considerable, while by the same measure his batting averages with the five major-league teams he played for between 1923 and 1939 were meager. The joke was that "Berg can speak a dozen languages but he can't hit in any of them." Berg didn't appear to mind such mild japes. As baseball's resident intellectual, he was a prominent ballplayer and he acted the part. His excellent posture complemented a certain aura of dignified restraint. Tall and handsome, he was also dapper, witty, and elusive, a man who wore gray Brooks Brothers suits on his back and attrac-

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tive women on his arm—there is a different one in every photograph. He rode the Trans-Siberian Railroad, taught himself some Japanese, and was a stunning success as a panelist on the nationally broadcast radio quiz show "Information, Please!" His acquaintances were many and diverse. All his life he was as comfortable with Casey Stengel, Joe DiMaggio, Groucho Marx, and Jimmy Breslin as he was with General Leslie Groves, Nelson Rockefeller, Johnny von Neumann, and Anita Loos.

In 1942 something to rival baseball in Berg's interest came along: Berg became an intelligence agent. He first worked as a spy in Latin America for Nelson Rockefeller's Office of the Coordinator of InterAmerican Affairs. The Office of Strategic Services (OSS) hired him in 1943 to trace what was feared to be a flourishing German atomic bomb program, sent him to Europe for the balance of the war, and awarded him the Medal of Freedom when he came home in 1946. Later, he went back to Europe for the CIA.

Moe Berg: Athlete, Scholar, Spy, a biography by Louis Kaufman, Tom Sewell, and Barbara Fitzgerald, published in 1974, revealed that, as a member of a baseball all-star team in Japan in 1934, Berg had dressed up in a kimono and geta, climbed to the roof of a Tokyo hospital, and made secret films of the city that were later used to plot the bombing targets for the Jimmy Doolittle air raids. The same book disclosed that during World War II Berg had once toured an Italian factory disguised as a Nazi officer and that, toward the end of the war, he had nearly assassinated the brilliant German physicist Werner Heisenberg.

Early on in my research, I discovered that I was not the only one to have been fascinated by Moe Berg. Edward Weeks, longtime editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, said that "one of the most versatile men I have ever known is Moe Berg," and newsmen of the 1920s, 1930s, and early 1940s were in complete agreement. They called him "Professor Berg," and they doted on him, especially John Kieran the erudite *New York Times* sports columnist who, whenever his typewriter required a frisson, summoned up "the learned catcher [who] moves mysteriously."

This fascination with Berg has legs, as they say. Berg has been dead for twenty-two years, but I gradually discovered that all over the world there are people who are, to varying degrees, obsessed with Moe Berg. For instance, Linda McCarthy, the curator of the CIA's private exhibit center at the agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia, has displayed one of Berg's baseball cards alongside such espionage curios as "Wild Bill" Donovan's pistol, some Bay of Pigs landing beacons, and a miniature camera disguised as a box of matches. She also sports "MOE BERG" vanity license plates on her car and is given to proclaiming, "I idolize Moe Berg."

Berg is said to have read a dozen newspapers a day, and it was his fetish that nobody could touch one of them while it was "alive." A bachelor I know in Washington still makes a habit of leaving a copy of the *Washington Post* for Berg on an end table in the lobby of Berg's favorite Washington hotel, the Mayflower. The same man has several copies of Berg's life mask on the walls of his two-room apartment, and he buys Pouilly Fuissé by the case, not because he likes it especially, but because this was Berg's wine of choice.

I actually encountered a Moe Berg enthusiast in Zurich. Another, in Los Angeles, has written and performs a one-man show about Berg's life. Another man I met told me that when he was a Princeton undergraduate he wooed his girlfriend first by telling her Moe Berg stories and then by inviting her up to his room to see his Moe Berg photographs. One of the assistant managing editors of the *New York Times* has been receiving letters on matters involving diction and syntax over the past few years from a correspondent who signs himself Moe Berg. George Allen, the owner of an antiquarian bookshop in Philadelphia, is disgusted with all this. In 1991, at his own expense, Allen published a handsome twenty-page pamphlet arguing that Moe Berg was a charlatan, a Renaissance fraud.

The character who has engaged all of these people and who first caught my attention may be called the public Moe Berg. He is, by any calculation, a dazzling fellow. Part Babe Ruth and part James Bond, he is straight out of a masculine American daydream. Yet, with the exception of Allen, who met Berg two or three times, none of the people who are so taken with Berg ever laid eyes on him. They know about him from reading the hagiographical 1974 biography and those dispatches written by Berg's friends in the pressroom—irresistible tales of the irresistible "Professor Berg."

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For a biographer, such a man posed a number of problems. Most obviously, it was difficult to learn many details from Berg's life in espionage because a spy's trade is, after all, secrecy, and Berg knew his business well. No man ever spoke more languages and said less in them than Moe Berg.

But I was fortunate. Most of the millions of confidential pieces of paper generated during the Second World War by the OSS have by now been declassified, thus permitting the historian the rare opportunity to retrace a spy's movements. After a few months of digging in the National Archives, I could follow Berg through Europe in 1944 and 1945 as he frantically sought to learn what fissionable horror Werner Heisenberg and Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker were concocting in their laboratories. Intelligence files are not exactly exercises in dramatic exposition, but Berg's own pouched missives were longer and more detailed than the terse communications sent in by most other agents.

What is more, Berg's eccentric behavior prompted the occasional lively burst of candor from his peers. There is, for example, this brief screed sent from the OSS spymaster Allen Dulles in Bern to OSS Director William Donovan in Washington: "Confidentially, he [Berg] is as easy to handle as an opera singer and [it is] difficult for me to find time these days to coddle him along. His work is at times brilliant, but also temperamental. When he leaves here this time, I think it preferable that his contacts be developed by Cabana [OSS agent Martin Chittick] and Kliefoth [OSS agent Max Kliefoth] and that he not return here for the time being." In fact, Donovan, and General Groves, who was in charge of the Manhattan Project, were devoted to Berg, and, because of their patronage, Berg went where he liked, at least until Germany surrendered and an American bomb was exploded over Hiroshima.

But these were only two years of Berg's life. To get at the rest, I talked with people. Old ballplayers and old spies alike inevitably begin discussing Berg by stressing that "I didn't really know Moe. I don't think anybody did." It turns out that Berg was as endlessly interesting to people who met him as he has been to everyone else. Such was Berg's fetish for secrecy that he could prompt people around him to become reticent themselves. Here, for example, are the last two lines of a four-line letter I received about Berg: "Moe Berg used to hide in a room built by my father, so I am told. My father knows much but may be somewhat tight-lipped." The letter was signed "Michele," contained no surname or return address and listed a telephone number that had been disconnected. Clearly, Berg was a deeply private man, but private in a way that worked as a fillip to curiosity. Nothing is more likely to spur the inquisitive mind than a man who is obviously keeping secrets about himself. Still, I did meet hundreds of people who spent time with Berg and were willing to describe him. In the end, a portrait emerged—and one that diverged rather sharply from the public Moe Berg.

With most biographical subjects, visiting the place where they lived is an essential way to learn about them. If you are writing about Harry Truman, you must get to know Independence, Missouri. New Orleans is as much a part of Louis Armstrong as New York is of Edith Wharton. Moe Berg is the exception. He spent the better part of his life after the war officially living in the Newark home owned by his bachelor brother, Dr. Sam Berg. But Berg was never happy at his brother's. In truth, he was never happy anywhere for long, and so he moved, fitfully and relentlessly, from Newark to New York, to Philadelphia, to Boston, to Oklahoma, to California, to Alberta, and so on.

Berg, I began to see, spent the last thirty years of his life in nearly constant motion. Robert Louis Stevenson said of himself, "I travel not to go anywhere, but to go." Berg was the same way. He moved from friend to friend, sometimes staying an hour, sometimes bunking in a spare room for weeks. One minute he'd be conversing with you in his grave, slightly nasal voice; the next, he was gone. "He was like a ghost," says Harvey Yavener, a reporter for the *Trenton Times* and a friend of Berg's. "He'd appear and disappear." William Fowler, a Nobel Prize-winning Cal Tech physicist and another of Berg's acquaintances, reported: "I'd invite him to dinner, and afterwards he'd just vanish."

I found shards of Berg everywhere I went. At MIT, the physicist Philip Morrison told me about the day during the war when Berg came to see him on Manhattan Project business at the Metallurgical Laboratory at the University of Chicago. Berg was carrying a German phys-

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ics journal he felt Morrison should see. Morrison already had a copy of the journal, but he didn't tell this to Berg, sensing it would hurt him too much.

Jimmy Breslin sat on a bed in his New York apartment between two constantly ringing telephones with a cold cigar in his mouth and a cup of espresso in his hand and talked with me all morning about the days he spent as a young reporter in the 1950s, pub crawling after work with Moe Berg. Also along for the fun were a clutch of other journalists, horse players, hoodlums, and, inevitably, a well-heeled gentleman to pick up the tab.

Joe DiMaggio remembered the night outside Toots Shor's bar in a driving snowstorm when he saw Berg and asked where he was going. "Home to my brother's in Newark, I guess," Berg told him. "Come home with me," DiMaggio said. Berg did—and stayed for six weeks.

Berg had odd relationships with people all over the country. At the secluded Adams Memorial in Washington's Rock Creek Park, Berg and a former OSS colleague named Clare Hall, whom he hadn't seen in years, recited Poe's poems together. A gentle snow was falling. Berg suddenly proposed marriage to Hall, who, shocked, turned him down. A few years later, after Hall had married someone else, Berg met her with her husband for lunch at the Mayflower. After the meal, Berg casually asked Hall to come up to his room for a moment; he had something to show her. They got upstairs, Berg shut the door and calmly began undressing in front of her. She ran away.

Whenever the Chicago White Sox were in New York to play the Yankees, Jerome Holtzman, the *Chicago Tribune* sportswriter, would check into a Manhattan hotel room in which the telephone was already ringing. Inevitably, it was Moe Berg downstairs in the lobby wanting to share Holtzman's suite instead of sleeping in Newark. Holtzman didn't mind. He always ordered a room with twin beds in anticipation of Berg's arrival. By day, Berg used up all the hot water while taking his obligatory three baths, an imposition that he compensated for by telling Holtzman wonderful stories at night.

In Los Angeles, Berg was introduced to an attractive widow and promptly suggested that she wash his shirts. In Philadelphia, he stayed up late at night defining and explaining the roots of the words his friend I. M. Levitt selected at random from a worn copy of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Levitt says that Berg never missed.

Berg traveled light, carrying only a toothbrush, a razor, and some old books. Clumps of newspapers peeped out of his jacket pockets. On the road, instead of hauling around a change of clothes—which he often couldn't afford—Berg would quietly wash everything before going to bed and hang it over the bathtub. In the morning, he was always up and dressed before anyone else. If you happened to brush his sleeve early in the day, you'd notice that it was damp.

Even Berg's taste in those clothes was part of an unanswered puzzle. Without fail, every day of the year he wore the gray suit, along with a white shirt, a black tie, and black shoes. His explanations for this personal uniform were vague.

Berg was a brilliant storyteller who, though he talked endlessly about himself, didn't finally reveal anything. Instead, he liked people to make assumptions about him. After he came home from the war, for example, most people assumed that Berg worked as a spy. Berg, of course, never said as much—what spy worth his salt would do that?—but it was obvious. Whenever anyone asked Berg what he did, he put a finger over his lips and made a sibilant hushing sound.

At some point during my long pursuit of the peripatetic and inscrutable Berg, I came to believe that his nearly constant motion had quite a lot to do with just who Moe Berg was. He wasn't merely looking for excitation in a new port or craving fresh sights. He wanted distraction. Travel was a salve for Berg, a way for him to sidestep things—and one thing in particular: himself. Moe Berg was the least introspective intelligent man I have ever encountered. That lack of self-scrutiny was deliberate. Berg never married, never had children or a home of his own, never learned to drive a car, never had a steady job or a half-steady girlfriend for the last thirty years of his life. Rather than make commitments of any sort, he traveled or, perhaps more precisely, he fled.

One of the pitfalls of writing biography is discovering the personal limits of your subject. John F. Kennedy was a less-than-perfect husband, Philip Larkin had a decidedly dreary streak, and Charlie Chaplin, Robert Frost, and

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Willie Mays weren't always so nice either. Most biographers are said to spend at least a short while disliking their subjects intensely, and I was certainly no exception. Some of the things I discovered about Moe Berg's unseemly relations with people greatly troubled me. He had many prurient impulses and lascivious propensities. He leached money shamelessly, never made any real effort to support himself after the war, was prone to tossing off racist remarks, and, worst of all for my purposes, I came to see that he liked people to think things about him which simply weren't true.

I spent a great deal of time trying to establish whether the films Berg made from the top of the Tokyo hospital were really done at the behest of the State Department and later used by Jimmy Doolittle. Eventually I concluded that dressing up in a Japanese costume and making these movies was all Berg's idea; nothing more than a stunt, really. Berg's films weren't used to plan the Doolittle raids; and the story about him slipping into an Italian factory dressed as an SS major wasn't true either. There was always some fact at the core of Berg's yarns. He did make the films in Tokyo, but on his own. No government officials knew about them until Berg invited some OSS panjandrums to a private screening in August 1942. But Doolittle had already bombed Tokyo four months earlier. In late August of 1944, Berg did tour an Italian optics factory in Florence that had been doing contract work for the Nazis, but he wasn't wearing a German uniform. He didn't need one. Florence had already been liberated, and the Fascists were out of business.

A brilliant raconteur who eagerly told stories about his days as a baseball player, Berg used the clandestine work he did for the CIA after the war as an excuse for not disclosing anything else about himself. Certainly, he said nothing of his work as a spy. He implied that, in the service of his country, such discretion was necessary. How then was a biographer to learn about Berg and the CIA? Again, I was aided by a measure of good fortune. The CIA's firm policy is that agent operations files are not to be declassified. Privately, however, several retired CIA men who had worked with Berg told me the extent of his association with the agency. I met them in quiet Boston apartments filled with Asian antiques or at picnic tables in lonely sections of Washington, D.C., city parks. They all said essentially the same thing: that Berg's association with the CIA had been brief, because when the agency gave him work, Berg did it poorly. Still, how did I know I could I trust them? Wasn't it possible that Berg had been a deep-cover agent involved in matters so sensitive that nobody could mention them?

"No," Richard Helms, the former director of the CIA, told me. "I understand your predicament and you can take it as truth that Moe Berg had no real role in the CIA. There is no secret or dirty trick or embarrassment at all. If there were, I wouldn't be sitting here today talking with you." If there were any doubts in my mind about Helms, Thomas Powers, Helms's Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer, smothered them. He told me in a convincing way that I could trust Helms when he said something like that.

In fact, Helms went so far as to set up appointments for me in Langley with CIA officials who could familiarize me with the contents of Berg's files. Everything I was told about Berg by CIA officials dovetailed with information that came from sources outside the agency. Moe Berg did some work for the CIA, but while he had thrived in the freewheeling OSS, he responded poorly to the CIA's more orderly approach to intelligence gathering. The CIA is tolerant of eccentrics, but it could have no truck with a man who spent its money freely and then dissembled instead of admitting that he had picked up no useful information. As a CIA agent, Berg was quickly and efficiently brushed aside.

So this was another case of premeditated deception by Berg—a subterfuge. For thirty years Berg was leading people to think he was an important CIA spy, when that just wasn't the case. Phony, I thought. Fraud. Fake. Then I thought some more. It's a small revelation that Moe Berg was not the CIA agent he led many people to think he was. The more interesting, dark, and so very human truth is that this brilliant, talented man who had once carried his country's atomic secrets and who really had been licensed to shoot Werner Heisenberg, had chosen after the war to keep living as though he were a spy even when he really wasn't one any longer. Plenty of people worked as CIA agents during the Cold War. Only one man created a secret persona for himself the way Moe Berg did.

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After learning about Estella Huni, a pianist with whom Berg shared a Manhattan apartment for several years, I was even more sympathetic to Berg. For a long while I had heard whispers about Berg's only real love affair, that with Miss Huni, which I knew had ended when Berg left for the war. I tried hard to locate Miss Huni, but she died two months before I discovered her address. I did meet her children, however, and although they couldn't tell me much—predictably, Moe Berg fell in love with a woman who was as secretive as he was—Estella Huni's son Paul Kahn showed me some photographs of his mother and Berg frolicking on the beach together. I'd never seen Berg looking anything but guarded and tense, and to find him there, smiling and relaxed—well, another side of him was revealed.

I became truly fascinated with the revised Moe Berg when I came upon Berg's possessions, which are in two New York libraries and in the hands of private collectors. Berg kept everything: ticket stubs from the Nuremberg trials, World Series programs, hotel receipts, and Christmas cards. Piled in cardboard boxes were also dozens of pocket diaries, letters, lists of his friends scribbled in moments of despair, photographs, drafts of his OSS intelligence files, and outlines of an autobiography that Berg was forever attempting and always abandoning. For a secretive man, he saved a remarkable record of his life. I shouldn't have been surprised. After all, those journalists who spread the Berg myth couldn't have done so without an accomplice named Moe Berg.

Berg *wanted* to be written about. During his life, he managed the way people presented him, and thus the way others saw him. In the end, instead of burning his papers, he left them behind, perhaps so that someone like me might happen upon them and see that this brilliant fellow was unbearably insecure; he lived much of his life clenched at the thought that he'd been a disappointment to his father, and yet perversely pleased about that too; he was confused about his religion and overwhelmed by his conflicting feelings about love. Berg embellished his autobiography because he felt he had to. He spent his life certain that nobody would like him the way he really was, so he remade himself in a way he thought would be appealing, and, for the most part, it was. I realized that Moe Berg lived to be written about.

If before I read Berg's papers I had felt guilty about writing the life of someone who was so private, I now felt a heady feeling of justification for my project. Throughout the last century and well into this one, what might be called the George Washington and the Parson Weems school of biography prospered. Biographers sought to create exemplars out of their subjects by presenting accomplished men and women as untarnished models of behavior. Ever since Lytton Strachey, a backlash to such hagiography has found biographers ruthlessly chopping prominent people down to wood chips. So enthusiastic have been the debunkers that biography itself has come under vigorous assault as a dissolute, voyeuristic form. Yet if we don't have biographers who are thorough sleuths, then wily and wounded men like Moe Berg will be presented superficially and inaccurately. Disclosing the unflattering facts of a man's life need not mean leaving his reputation spattered on the pavement of history.

The idea is, as Alice James's biographer Jean Strouse says, not to judge, but rather to explain "why people do the things they do." Emerson said that "there is properly no history, only biography," and what he meant is that people will always require explanations for the personal choices that govern events. Good biography analyzes the way interesting people have responded to life. "I well remember," wrote James Boswell, "that Dr. Johnson maintained, that 'If a man is to write a Panegyrick, he may keep vices out of sight; but if he professes to write A Life, he must represent it really as it was:' and when I objected to the danger of telling that [the poet Thomas] Parnell drank to excess, he said, that 'It would produce an instructive caution to avoid drinking, when it was seen, that even the learning and genius of Parnell could be debased by it.' " As for Boswell, who was hardly a moral paragon, he said flatly that "in writing a life, a man's peculiarities must be mentioned because they mark his character."

When writing about Moe Berg, I fretted about the effect that dismantling the public Berg would have on the many people I'd met who adored and had come to depend upon the magic of "Professor Berg." Suddenly I was telling them that he wasn't who they thought he was. Worse, he had a sordid side. But in the end, I had to believe that they would agree

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with me that the real Moe Berg is actually a more compelling man than the two-dimensional Berg of myth.

Moe Berg, who read a good deal of Greek and Latin even if his fluency was exaggerated, had what I think was a very sensible perspective on myths and heroes. Toward the end of his life, Berg spent a lot of time riding in a car around Jersey City, New Jersey, with a friend of his, a salesman named William Klein. Klein would park the car and make business calls while Berg dozed in the front seat. When Klein's appointments were finished, he and Berg would repair to a White Castle hamburger restaurant where Berg would wolf down the burgers Klein bought him and then slake his thirst with "a coffee," as he called it, in his European way. One day, Berg looked at Klein and declared, "There are no supermen, Willie." To know about Berg's peculiarities and deceptions is to know a fascinating man. People don't need biographers to produce pristine fantasy heroes. To know that a man such as Berg had troubles makes him more of an exemplar than the public Berg ever could have been.

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Vick's Salve

PHILIP MILLER

Comes in the blue bottle,
plastic now, but then
cool blue glass,
color of flames dancing
in the gas stove by my
old bed, color of
cigarette smoke
from Mother's cork-tipped
Old Gold, as she rubbed it in
until all you could smell
was Vick's as in Mother's
room fifty years later
still using it to open
her lungs—the blue bottle
tells you—*temporarily,*
and tonight after my last
smoke I rub it in, too,
let the air fill with its
camphorous fumes, massage
it into my forehead,
over my nostrils
into my clogged chest,
close to the heart,
let it burn
like a shot of whiskey
taken down in one gulp.

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The Glorifier

Florenz Ziegfeld and the Creation of the American Showgirl

MICHAEL LASSER

Few people have the opportunity to live out their fantasies and become rich and famous doing it. Walt Disney did it through his animated feature films, and Hugh Heffner, of all people, has done it through his determination to live a public life as *Playboy Magazine*'s randy rabbit disguised as a closet intellectual. Florenz Ziegfeld also did it.

Ziegfeld was the greatest impresario in the history of the Broadway musical, yet even though he produced the classic American play, *Show Boat*, in 1927, and such important successes as *Rio Rita* (1927) and *Whoopee* (1928), his reputation rests primarily on the *Ziegfeld Follies*, the extravagant theatrical revues he supervised, shaped, and staged each year between 1907 and his death in 1932. More than anyone of his time, Florenz Ziegfeld shaped the American perception of female beauty. Nearly a century later that perception still lingers. The dancer Irene Castle taught women that all of them could be graceful and lovely. Ziegfeld showed all of us that no one could be as magnificent as a *Follies* Girl.

Nothing expressed Ziegfeld's innate theatricality and his passion for opulence more brilliantly or more blatantly than the *Follies*. The *Follies* confirmed his gift for intuiting the public taste, they reveled in the mix of elegance and vulgarity that became his trademark, and they celebrated his undying fascination with beautiful women. Ziegfeld was a man of drive, towering ego, and exceptional good luck. He was also a man of vision, tawdry perhaps, made of little more than tinsel, spangles, and light, but he served it devotedly. Sometimes his gimmicks were elegant, sometimes corny, sometimes merely garish. He occasionally used live curtains composed of scores of showgirls, and once he had a live ostrich with a bejeweled collar carry a girl across the stage. Regardless of what else he might do, there was always the gleaming staircase down which stepped his glorified showgirls in perfect step, alternately dressed in mink, satin, chinchilla, and lace. Nothing was too good for them, nothing too expensive, nothing too outlandish.

A revue makes no claim on dramatic literature. It is theater pure and simple. Revues consisted of a series of separate acts, each one complete in itself, varying from comic sketches to solo songs and dances to production numbers. No one ever sits down to read a revue. No one ever studies one as you might a play. No one ever revives one because they are, by definition, topical and occasional. In 1909, six years after the Wright Brothers' flight, Ziegfeld's featured star, the beautiful Lillian Lorraine, circled up and over the audience in a miniature airplane hanging from the ceiling, scattering roses while she sang a long-forgotten trifle entitled "Up, Up, Up in My Airship." In the same *Follies*, Ziegfeld dressed his showgirls as taxicabs and outfitted them with battery packs. At a suitable moment, on an otherwise darkened stage, they turned on their headlights.

Ziegfeld had great affection for the stars who sang and danced for his audiences, but he

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lavished his attention on the most beautiful and least talented members of his huge casts—the showgirls. More than anything, he loved to see beautiful women glamorously and scantily dressed, moving decorously through extravagant settings. It had to have been his own small peek at what he believed awaited him in heaven.

If so, it was a heaven we no longer find recognizable or tolerable. Feminism has taught us all the necessary cautionary lessons about the public ogling of women. How strange it must seem to those under forty that a theatrical producer could have become one of the most celebrated, romantic, even envied figures of his day for his success at the public display of women who were presented as little more than a collection of breasts, legs, and buttocks.

Florenz Ziegfeld was a perfectionist who oversaw the *Follies* from curtain to curtain, so the question is not whether he controlled the women he employed, but rather how he treated them. Although others made contributions along the way—especially Anna Held and Lady Duff Gordon—the shaping vision was Ziegfeld's. Singlehandedly, he created what we've come to call the showgirl. He set her styles and standards, and more than occasionally he escorted her to his bed. Ziegfeld truly loved women—and he tried to love as many of them as he possibly could.

He once returned home at five in the morning to be confronted by Billie Burke, the movie actress who was his second wife. She accused him of spending the night with Olive Thomas, one of the most beautiful of the showgirls, with whom Ziegfeld did have an affair. She grabbed a silver soup ladle and whacked him with it. He laughed and carried her upstairs to bed. Another time he said to her, "The problem with you, Billie, is that you always pick the wrong girl."

By all accounts, Florenz Ziegfeld was an apathetic child and adolescent. Although his father was the founder and director of the Chicago Musical College, Florenz Jr. had little interest in music or anything else. At their wit's end, his parents sent him to work on a cattle ranch in Wyoming in 1886, when he was seventeen. He returned a changed young man, with a will of his own and a delight in his own newly discovered ebullience. In the still wide-open West, he had become a charming taker of chances.

When his father received an appointment to provide musical entertainment as part of the Columbia Exposition, Chicago's world's fair of 1893, Flo Jr. wangled an assignment to travel to Europe to find suitable performers. Although he returned with seven of Europe's leading musical ensembles, the show was a dreadful flop. Undaunted, Ziegfeld left for New York to sign an amiable strongman calling himself The Great Sandow. He had decided to become a theatrical entrepreneur. Sandow's act was only moderately successful despite its uniqueness. He would appear in silk trunks in a series of classical "art poses," after which he would allow a man to sit in the palm of his hand and would later lift a grand piano with a group of men sitting on it.

Ziegfeld arranged for Sandow to appear at the Chicago Exposition's Trocadero nightclub and managed to persuade Mrs. Potter Palmer, a monument of social rectitude, to visit backstage to examine the strongman's biceps. He also arranged for the press to cover the otherwise private audience. "What wonderful muscles you have," Mrs. Palmer said. Sandow invited her to touch them. Soon after, she told the eager reporters that, when she did so, she felt "thrilled to the spine." Almost overnight, prominent men and women were flocking backstage for private strokings of Sandow's arms as grosses at the Trocadero rose from two thousand to twenty-eight thousand dollars per week.

Despite Ziegfeld's gift for theatricality, he was not the inventor of the revue form. Although none of his competitors ever equaled the *Follies* in extravagance, the first American revue, titled *The Passing Show*, had appeared thirteen years earlier in 1894. The form had emerged in France as a topical alternative to the escapist comic operas that had dominated popular French theater. A contemporary critic explained the new form to his readers: "It is a review, in dramatic form, of the chief events of the past year—political, historical, and theatrical."

The producers of the original *Passing Show* subtitled it "a topical extravaganza," but only Ziegfeld could turn the revue into an essential and influential form of American theater. The early *Follies* were as irreverent as they were topical, and that irreverence, combined with increasingly lavish productions, gave them an up-to-date, confident feeling just when such

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modernity and confidence had become important ideas in American life. Just down the street from the early editions of Ziegfeld's *Follies,* George M. Cohan was confidently strutting his jaunty, cock-of-the-walk way through such songs as "Yankee Doodle Boy" and "You're a Grand Old Flag." It was a time when people believed that anything was possible in America. The American theater mirrored that expansive optimism, and Broadway was the American theater. Cohan played to shopgirls; Ziegfeld wanted—and got—the carriage trade.

The revue flourished after World War I. During the 1920s, when traditional values were breaking down with unheard of rapidity, the reliance of the revue on spectacle and theatricality let it safely poke fun at the changes going on all around it. If the speakeasy aggressively thumbed its pug nose at convention, Ziegfeld's extravagant revue preferred to glance down its perfect nose at the same convention. It was hard to see anything subversive in something so glamorous, and while Ziegfeld was willing to make a little fun, he would never make his audiences uneasy. Their taste was his taste. For as long as he lived and the extravagant revue flourished, its essence remained its reliance not on satire but on beauty.

As for the *Follies* themselves, the idea had come from a woman—Ziegfeld's first wife, Anna Held. She was a soprano whose success in Viennese light opera rested on her beguiling combination of innocence, beauty, and sexuality, rather than on her tiny voice. Ziegfeld first saw her on a European trip in 1896, fell in love with her, and persuaded her to come to America, even though he was flat broke at the time. He knew immediately that her sex appeal provided him with a worthy successor to The Great Sandow. The Broadway shows in which he presented her were insignificant, yet she became his second important attraction. At this point in his career, he was much more an upstart promoter than an audacious impresario—though the difference between them may be primarily a matter of perception. Ziegfeld always had a genius for publicity and promotion.

At a time when most Broadway shows closed in the summer to escape New York's oppressive heat and humidity, Held suggested that her husband open a smart revue based on the satiric cabaret shows then popular in France. Ziegfeld named it *The Follies* to evoke *The Follies Bergère,* because he understood that he needed to set a sophisticated continental tone to appeal to a well-heeled audience looking for something to do during the long, lazy summer. His own native flamboyance soon took him far beyond anything a Parisian might have considered sophisticated. This was pure American hyperbole, softened with enough money to make it look classy, and served up sexy enough to twit the bluenoses and earn Flo Ziegfeld enough money to live handsomely and start up another *Follies* the next year.

Before Ziegfeld, most Broadway revues used about twenty chorus girls who made three costume changes during the show. Ziegfeld was determined to move well past those limits. He would make his revue so large and lavish it would become an entirely different experience—something to be marveled at rather than merely watched. In Marjorie Farnsworth's phrase, he would create in his audiences "a feast of desire." Plays never interested Ziegfeld; theater did. And theater he would provide as never before. *The Follies* would be Ziegfeld's own flamboyant way of saying something about himself. As Marjorie Farnsworth wrote in her book *The Ziegfeld Follies*: "In place of twenty girls, he would have 120 girls whose figures would be as provocative as their faces; tall, stately girls, radiant with youth and draped in priceless costumes of furs, gems, laces, ribbons, and flowers, who would need only to walk with patrician grace before the footlights."

Paulette Goddard was less sanguine than Farnsworth about what it meant to be a Ziegfeld Girl. Before she married Charlie Chaplin and became a Hollywood star in the 1940s, Goddard appeared in one of Ziegfeld's other successful shows, *Rio Rita.* All she had to do was sit on a cardboard moon and smile. She later explained that "girls were far more frivolous then because . . . nothing was expected of them. I could tap [dance] but I was never given the chance. Ziegfeld used to say I was a great sitter. I sat and I walked."

Despite the scantiness of the costumes and the richness of the fabrics, the ideas for the *Follies* Girls' production numbers soon became a riot of inventiveness, if not of good taste. In 1909, the girls wore miniature battleships on their heads in a tribute to the forty-eight

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states. When the stage lights darkened, the ships lit up against a background of Manhattan's tallest buildings. Ten years later, Ziegfeld began the *Follies* with one of his most remarkable spectacles, "The Follies Salad," in which the girls paraded as Lettuce, Spice, Oil, Chicken, Vinegar, Salt, and Pepper. The *Ziegfeld Follies* was, among other things, beyond parody.

Right from the start, Ziegfeld had the most beautiful chorus line on Broadway and he dressed the girls in it in style. And he knew how to dramatize them: show a little, suggest a lot, and don't let them stay on the stage too long. After all, most of them couldn't do anything but walk. Yet despite *The Follies'* immediate success, it took time for Ziegfeld to develop and define what he meant by a *Follies* Girl.

Later on, Ziegfeld would love to give interviews so he could explain how he selected and trained these women. He knew what he was looking for, he was opinionated, and he had the authority to impose his opinions on the young woman who would have given anything to be in one of his shows. There was no matter too small for his attention. For example, he would allow no hair dyes. "Nature," he said, "is the best wigmaker and she knows what colors to mix." He would permit any color eyes except gray because "they're too intellectual and belong only on a college girl." As for her figure, "Correct proportions count, of course, but I've had girls who weighed 145 pounds and looked like Venus."

No part of Florenz Ziegfeld's work was more important than finding and dressing beautiful women. Give him some silk, some makeup, and some lighting, and he would create an onstage illusion of female beauty more vivid and more irresistible than anyone before or since.

Once, near the end of a rehearsal for a new edition of the *Follies*, Ziegfeld insisted on costly petticoats of Irish linen for the showgirls. Someone asked, "But why? You can't see them." "I know," he answered, "but Irish linen does something to their walk." He believed the quality of the fabric against their bodies made them feel and act more feminine and enhanced the grace of their movement on the stage. "Remember," he'd say, "they're Ziegfeld girls." He always knew exactly what he wanted, and he would spend or gamble anything to get it. The reasons didn't need to be clear to anyone else. He knew he was creating an empire of entertainment at whose heart was an approach to female beauty he would call "Glorifying the American Girl."

Before Ziegfeld, chorus girls earned no more than thirty dollars a week. He paid a standard seventy-five dollars and sometimes much more, but he got what he wanted in return. Eddie Cantor, the great *Follies* star who co-wrote a worshipful biography of Ziegfeld in 1934, said of his achievements: "Never before did the women of the world have such a gallant and chivalrous champion, and never before was the heart of feminine beauty developed into such a vast industry." Cantor's metaphor of beauty transformed into something manufactured, the product of Ziegfeld's own assembly line, was truer—and less flattering—than the comedian must have realized.

Despite the relish with which he fussed over details, Ziegfeld never lost sight of his own sustaining vision of beauty, sexuality, and audience appeal. He traded in fantasy and, like F. Scott Fitzgerald's Jay Gatsby in the 1920s, "there was something gorgeous about him"—or at least about his ambitions. Like Gatsby, to quote Fitzgerald again, he possessed "an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person." Gatsby failed because he gave his heart to a single woman who was unworthy of his transforming dream. Ziegfeld, wiser and more practical, gave his attention to thousands and his heart to very few. He fell in love with Anna Held but left her for Lillian Lorraine, the beautiful *Follies* star who was probably the great love of his life. He also remained married, though by no means faithful, to his second wife, Billie Burke.

Unlike Gatsby, Ziegfeld knew exactly how to get what he wanted. He selected every single showgirl himself—more than three thousand of them in all. He enjoyed explaining how he did it. "They must attract men," he said. "You cannot define the quality." And then he defined it: "I would say it is promise, a promise of romance and excitement—all the things a man dreams about when he thinks of the word *girl*." When Ziegfeld listened to the lyrics Irving Berlin had written for the *Follies*' signature song—"A pretty girl is like a melody / That haunts you night and day"—he responded, "That's it, that haunting quality. Some plain women have it, only when they have it, they're not plain any more."

Eddie Cantor wrote that Ziegfeld's secret

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was variety. He'd pick one girl for her beautiful face, another for her remarkable figure. If he chose someone for her red hair, she'd be the only redheaded showgirl that year. Regardless of her individual appeal, he said, each showgirl had to possess form and grace more than facial beauty. There was the way she looked in the lights, the way she fit in with the rest of the ensemble, and—most important—whatever it was that Ziegfeld had seen in her.

Ziegfeld was neither reflective nor intellectual. He was more an old-fashioned showman than anything else, squarely in the tradition of P. T. Barnum. What he knew, he knew intuitively. And he knew that while women might admire a showgirl's beauty or her costume or her grace, she existed to please men. Yet the women in the audience apparently did not resent the Ziegfeld Girl. She was forbidden and remote, and Ziegfeld kept her that way, at least within the theater. No Sugar Daddy ever got through the stage door of a Ziegfeld show—no one ever got closer than the first row. They would have to wait outside until the curtain came down. Ziegfeld was a master of illusion, and he knew how to create its necessary sense of distance. He employed suggestion rather than revelation; he even thought bare legs were less sexy than legs in silk tights. On those occasions when showgirls did appear in the nude, they were scattered among the laces, roses, and spangles of his elaborate tableaux, and they were not allowed to move a single muscle. He traded not in sex but in fantasy. Men swallowed it, and women accepted it for what it was.

Ziegfeld's authority also extended beyond the footlights. Many of the girls had come to the *Follies* from farms and factories. Occasionally, they were successful models, but more often they were uneducated waitresses or office workers he'd spotted and hired. He was their finishing school; he gave them the education they needed and he wanted them to have. He bought them a chance at the high life. Though he paid them seventy-five dollars a week, many of them wore furs and diamonds. He insisted that they be well dressed in public, so he taught them it was better to have one expensive, well-tailored dress than several cheaper ones. He forbade their wearing heavy makeup offstage, and he expected them to arrive for rehearsal neatly and simply dressed. Few would risk losing their jobs by breaking Mr. Ziegfeld's rules. He was a Victorian paterfamilias with a bevy of beautiful daughters to tend and train. On audition days, he would sit first row center, looking over the hundreds of aspirants who would walk across the brightly lit stage, until suddenly he would call out to someone in his high-pitched voice, and, like that, there would be a new Ziegfeld Girl to envy and reckon with.

The approach of opening night fills actors, directors, and producers alike with dread. Only Ziegfeld was immune to its terrors. He never saw the *Follies* as something finished. He'd toss out a song or add a new one weeks, even months, into the run. Anything to keep the show up-to-date and on its toes. A few days before an opening, he'd replace an entire number or hire a new singer or toss out thousands of dollars of costumes. He'd suddenly call his writers to say he wanted an Indian scene because he had decided to bring out the girls in crowns of feathers four feet long, or he'd call his staff to say he had seen a picture of somebody's legs in the newspaper and he wanted to find out who she was so he could offer her a job.

All of Ziegfeld's important associates were men—the directors, the choreographers, the set designers, the songwriters—but his costume designer was a woman, the British couturier Lady Duff Gordon, who used the professional name Lucille. He happened to go to her salon one day with his wife, Billie Burke, and was bored until the girls appeared modeling formal gowns. There he discovered the source of what would soon become the Ziegfeld Girl. From Lucille's salon came the *mannequins*, beautiful models who used only a single name and paved the way for the full emergence of the showgirls Florenz Ziegfeld would glorify. Before Lucille, there were chorus girls who were required to sing and dance as well as look good. After Lucille, there were showgirls who looked beautiful and dressed and walked beautifully. That was all, and that was enough. In fact, clothing became so important a part of the showgirl's definition that when Irving Berlin opened his own series of extravagant revues in the early 1920s, he wrote a signature song for the entrance of his own showgirls called "Beautiful Faces Need Beautiful Clothes." Berlin had obviously learned about showgirls from the years he spent writing for Ziegfeld.

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It's not entirely clear if the idea of using *mannequins* in the *Follies* was Ziegfeld's or Lucille's; but it is clear that Ziegfeld was never troubled by their lack of talent. He saw them as beautiful creatures and he reveled in their beauty. All he wanted them to do was walk down a staircase and across the stage wearing Lucille's gowns. Lucille trained her models to project a frosty, detached, somewhat snobbish beauty. It passed for sophistication, and Ziegfeld adored it. Lucille began to design for the *Follies* in 1915.

So Ziegfeld had the look he wanted, but he didn't find his theme song for another four years, twelve years after the first *Follies.* Beginning in 1919, each night as the curtain rose and the girls walked the careful Ziegfeld walk the master had taught them, the tenor John Steele serenaded them to the fulsome words of Irving Berlin's "A Pretty Girl Is Like a Melody." Three years later, when the extravagant revues had already begun their slow decline, he first used the *Follies'* motto, "Glorifying the American Girl." The choice of words is noteworthy. Ziegfeld's goal *was* to glorify, but the object of his glorification was a girl rather than a woman, not because she was young or virginal, but because she was empty. Showgirls had no personality and no talent—only someone else's artifice. They seemed to offer the glamorized but depersonalized bodies of women, a promise as false as the Victorian vision of woman, maternal yet sexless, enshrined on a pedestal, or as the *Playboy* centerfold, naked, self-absorbed, and ultimately uninteresting. They were not performers, but rather performance itself. Yet they offered something new: the tantalizing promise of sexual perfection. Wealthy men pursued them, lusting after the dream come true. It was relentlessly erotic, strangely passionless, and increasingly jaded.

Once Lucille's icy but extraordinarily feminine models joined the *Follies,* they merged effortlessly with Ziegfeld's ardent theatricality to create the showgirl, a new species of creature in her own right. She moved in a rarefied atmosphere of perfect beauty and staggering wealth. Cartier and Tiffany and Van Cleef & Arpel could not have been happier. The other extravagant revues, like *Earl Carroll's Vanities* and *George White's Scandals* also had their share of beautiful women, but a *Follies* Girl stood apart. Ziegfeld invested them with a celebrity they could parlay into fame and fortune. Some, before they were done, made the Social Register, and others the police blotter. They might end up poor and forgotten; they might end up in Hollywood. Largely forgotten today, their names were always in the papers in the 1920s. Readers couldn't get enough of their rise to fame, their escapades, or their lovers.

The showgirl Marion Davies was considered one of the loveliest, most ambitious blondes on Broadway when William Randolph Hearst first saw her during the 1916–1917 season. He returned every night for eight weeks. Eventually they met and became lovers, and he backed her less-than-spectacular career in movies. During the 1920s, he spent seven million dollars trying to make her a top star. Instead, she became a reasonably popular movie actress, a legendary hostess at San Simeon, and a very wealthy woman.

The most famous of all the *mannequins* was known only as Dolores, and for a while every girl in America wanted to look like her. Ziegfeld paid her $650 a week, more than any other *mannequin* at the time ever earned. She was by no means the most beautiful of the showgirls, but she had a greater effect on Ziegfeld and his audiences than any of the others. She was blonde, patrician in manner, and statuesque, one of the most spectacular women he ever presented. In the *Follies of 1917,* she made her debut as "The Discourager of Hesitancy" in a production number entitled "Ladies of Fashion." Although she was one of nine models in the procession, the next day only she was the talk of New York.

Ziegfeld also used Dolores in the somewhat smaller midnight revues he mounted in the theatrical nightclub he ran on the roof of the New Amsterdam Theatre. Dressed in a pearl-trimmed white satin sheath, she walked in a pin spot across a dark stage. As always, her walk was haughty and proud. Her arms outstretched, she paraded in glittering blue-green and pink spangles and bugle beads embroidered to resemble a peacock's feathers on white satin. She wore a white satin cap tied under her chin, and peacock feathers hung from a satin band around her forehead. Her shoulders and arms were bare. She wore a fan that towered over her and surrounded her, so large it seemed to lift her into the air. It is said that the audience gasped before it began to cheer.

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With the coming of Dolores, the *Follies* added the famous Ziegfeld walk—a haughty, chin-up glide accented by a lifted shoulder and a slow pace. There was never a reason to hurry; everyone would wait for a Ziegfeld Girl. She would enter the spotlight very quietly. She was unsmiling and made no great show of movement, but as she walked downstage, a small glimmer of a smile would appear. As she reached center stage, her arms extended and her costume gleaming in the light, she would finally smile for the waiting audience. Dolores herself ended up unlike many of the most famous Ziegfeld Girls: she married happily and wealthily, and got out of show business.

The showgirls were women of little education who had nothing to rely on but the ambition they possessed and the savvy they could learn. They lived in a world that acclaimed them but had little use for them. They had little to offer but their beauty, their bodies, and their willingness to put themselves on display. Ziegfeld taught them only to live at the top and how to conduct themselves only as long as they were beautiful. They learned from him to grab all they could for as long as they could. When they did, they became the stuff of gossip columns and comedy routines. The legend was that all *Follies* Girls married millionaires. Enough of them did to inspire *Follies* comic Will Rogers to observe, with tongue in cheek, "We have a hard time keeping our girls together, especially on tour. Every time we get to a new town, some of them marry millionaires, but in a few weeks they catch up with the show again." Paulette Goddard said that Ziegfeld once sent her and another showgirl to Palm Beach because "we were his pets. He guessed we'd each catch ourselves a millionaire. In two weeks, I was engaged to one, but when I told him I was fifteen, he dropped me cold."

Imogene Wilson is perhaps the most revealing example of what could happen to a showgirl who believed the Ziegfeldian hype. An orphan raised by nuns, she became a model who joined the *Follies* after Ziegfeld saw her photograph. One night, the noted comic Frank Tinney noticed her onstage and offered to take her home after the show. That began their affair. She hadn't bothered to learn he was married, and he hadn't offered the information. Later, he explained, "Sure I have a wife, a mortgage, and an appendix, but why should I bring these things up and spoil a pleasant evening? I believe a man should keep his troubles to himself."

Even though Imogene Wilson eventually told her story to the newspapers and confronted Tinney and his wife at their home, the affair continued. Eventually, Tinney tired of her and began to hit her. Once she showed the girls in the dressing room an enormous black and blue mark on her stomach. They told her to keep quiet about it—what a husband doesn't know about a girl won't hurt her, they said, but every millionaire will know about you and Tinney, and not one of them will marry you and you'll probably lose your job.

Wilson sued Tinney for assault when he entered her apartment one night and beat her so severely that Ziegfeld's doctor observed, "The girl looks as though she had been struck by an automobile." Reporters flocked to her bedside so they could interview her, sitting up with her bare arms showing the bruises against a silk blanket. "I loved him," they quoted her as saying. He went off to England and she pursued him, but he began beating her again. When the affair finally ended, she remained in Europe to make films. Her reviews were terrible, but she landed movie roles because of her beauty and her notoriety. She had many other lovers, and many of them also beat her. Her movie career ended and, her looks gone, she suffered a stroke and died penniless at age forty-two.

No woman could hope to be as breathtaking or desirable as Ziegfeld made her. Yet every night, from 8:40 P.M. until just before midnight, the showgirl was fantasy incarnate. Florenz Ziegfeld was a master of illusion, a gambler, and an exhibitionist who always believed he could find whatever money he needed for *The Follies*. He was usually right. He never cared about money for its own sake. He saw it, not as wealth or even as power, but as possibility. He was a calculating romantic, a devious innocent, who truly adored women but who also used them without hesitation to embody whatever dream of the moment was playing out in his restless imagination. Like so many other American dreamers, he concocted himself out of his dreams, and then he embodied himself in the showgirls he invented, glorified, and, in his own way, loved.

The showgirl remains alive these days in

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such watering holes as Las Vegas and Atlantic City, but she's become ordinary and predictable. What remains is her beauty—merely her beauty—without Ziegfeld's adoration and the gift of his transforming imagination. The Depression struck in 1929, Ziegfeld died in 1932, and a peculiarly American dream faded forever from view.

The Infinite

GIACOMO LEOPARDI

I always loved this solitary hill,
This hedgerow too, secreting from the view
So large a part of the far world's horizon.
But sitting here and gazing, in thought I conjure,
Beyond that hedge, the interminable tracts,
And silence more than man's, and peace so deep
The heart is all but daunted. And as I listen
To the wind at whisper in this foliage, so
That infinite silence to this very voice
I keep comparing, and there come to mind
Thoughts of *the eternal*, of old seasons dead,
And of ours now, vital, rife—the sound of it.
Amid this vastitude, all thought's awash:
And it's sweet to be lost in shipwreck on this sea.

English version by JOHN FREDERICK NIMS

✪ GIACOMO LEOPARDI (1798–1837), one of the most formidable linguists, thinkers, and scholars of his century, is one of the greatest of Italian poets. "L'Infinito" (1819) is probably his best-known poem. JOHN FREDERICK NIMS's most recent books of poetry are *The Six-Cornered Snowflake* and *Zany in Denim*. The enlarged third edition of his *Sappho to Valéry: Poems in Translation* was published in 1990.

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The Law's Leaden Muse

RICHARD A. POSNER

THE OXFORD DICTIONARY OF AMERICAN LEGAL QUOTATIONS. *Edited by Fred R. Shapiro. Oxford University Press. $49.95.*

If I were compiling a book of legal quotations, my aim would be twofold: to demonstrate that judges and other members of the legal profession have on a few occasions scaled the heights of eloquence or uttered the penetrating aperçu; and, by memorializing these literary-rhetorical achievements in readily appropriable form, to facilitate and encourage wisdom and eloquence in law. That aim would determine my principles of selection. I would be looking for passages of outstanding literary merit or piercing insight, written in English, which could be lifted out of their context without a fatal loss of force or meaning. It would be a short book. Not because most legal writing is bad—it is, but that is true of any area of discourse—but because radical compression is not the virtue in law that it is in poetry, humor, polemic, and the gnomic-sententious tradition (or traditions) in theology, literature, and philosophy that runs from the Book of Proverbs to Pascal and Rochefoucauld and Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and on to Nietzsche and Wilde and the late writings of Wittgenstein. Probably the two greatest "one-liners" in law, both by Holmes, are: "The life of the law has not been logic: it has been experience" and "The Fourteenth Amendment does not enact Mr. Herbert Spencer's Social Statics." Yet they lose terribly from being taken out of their context, as Ambrose Bierce's definition of "litigation" (in *The Devil's Dictionary*) does not: "A machine which you go into as a pig and come out as a sausage." It was written to be read by itself, and it was not written by a lawyer.

Fred Shapiro's *Oxford Dictionary of American Legal Quotations* proceeds on different principles of selection. "This book," he tells us in the preface, "brings together for convenient reference and browsing the most famous, the wittiest, and the most insightful words about American law." He has "made great efforts to include *all* the most famous law-related quotations" (emphasis mine) but has supplemented these "well-known passages with many others that are not famous but that deserve to be because of their wit, eloquence, or insight." The book contains more than 3,500 quotations, arranged in more than 200 subject-matter headings, ranging from "Abortion" to "Yale Law School," whose library employs Mr. Shapiro, a distinguished legal bibliographer. In between, along with such familiar categories as "Constitution," "Due Process," "Judges," "Negligence," and "Precedent," are some racier ones, such as "Courtroom Scenes" and "Opinions, Curious." Within each category the quotations are arranged chronologically, rather than alphabetically by author; but an author index enables the reader to find all quotations (grouped by subject matter) from a particular author. The chronological arrangement enables the reader to trace the decline of legal eloquence, wit, and pith, as quotations from judges on a particular subject give way to quotations from judges' law clerks on the subject. Shapiro claims—happily the claim is false—that the book constitutes "a distillation of the best thought on legal issues."

The realistic, although not only, aim to

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which Mr. Shapiro's criteria of selection point is to provide a reference volume for judges, law professors, and practicing lawyers (and the occasional non-lawyer) who want a quotation about law to illustrate, punctuate, spice up, or give some class to a judicial opinion, brief, speech, or other utterance. The user of the volume may know the quotation (remember that Shapiro has tried to include all famous quotations about American law) but not the source or may simply be searching for an apt quotation. For either purpose the book is well suited, although the inclusion of occasional passages from statutes and from the statute-like "Restatements of the Law" can only be in the service of the author's subsidiary and quixotic aim of furnishing "a distillation of the best thought on legal issues." The total exclusion of references to English as distinct from American law makes no sense that I can see. The American legal system is based upon and continuous with the English, and some of the most famous literary references to law—many by Shakespeare and Dickens—are equally apropros to either. Mr. Bumble's "The law is a ass" is not an ethnocentric reference. Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* are still heavily cited and quoted in American legal opinions, while the writings of English judges and scholars of the nineteenth century are full of quotable stuff (as remarked in a passage by Cardozo that Shapiro quotes!).

Mr. Shapiro is a very careful bibliographer. He tells us, and I believe him, that the dictionary's "citations are exact down to the page number, in keeping with the requirements of legal citation form," and thus "are suitable for use in legal writing," that is, without having to look up the quotation in its original setting. This will be a big help to legal professionals, who will be the principal users of his book—though at the same time it panders to one of the worst vices of lawyers and judges: their propensity to quote out of context.

Despite the difference in aims, Mr. Shapiro's book of quotations overlaps the one I would have compiled in his place. His favorite legal writer, Oliver Wendell Holmes, is also my favorite legal writer. A useful table in the preface informs us that 255 of the 3,500-odd quotations are from Holmes, almost twice as many as the runner-up—Justice Robert Jackson, who though less well known than a number of other legal figures, such as Marshall, Cardozo, and Brandeis, was in fact their superior in eloquence. Yet after Jackson, and almost tied with him, comes Benjamin Cardozo. Cardozo was a famous judge and a good writer—but only sometimes. Especially in his books, as distinct from his judicial opinions, his writing tends to floridity and preciosity. Fortunately these deformities are only occasionally in evidence in the passages that Shapiro has included; but Learned Hand, who was a better writer still, is represented in this book by a fourth fewer quotations than Cardozo. John Marshall receives his due, but Felix Frankfurter, an overheated prosodist, receives more than his. Abraham Lincoln may well be the greatest rhetorician in American history (as well as the most highly paid Illinois lawyer of his time), but, save in the entries under "Slavery," he is represented here by bromides, such as "*Legislation* and *adjudication* must follow, and conform to, the progress of society." Living Supreme Court justices, few of whom, as I have already hinted, write their own opinions, are heavily represented, illustrating the frequent divergence of quality from short-term fame and yielding such unmemorable specimens as: "The fact that Congress generally does not transgress constitutional limits on its power to reach state activities does not make judicial review any less necessary to rectify the cases in which it does do so." (Notice the clumsy double negative, the solecism of "rectifying" a "case" rather than an error, and the redundant final two words.) Or: "The First Amendment requires that we protect some falsehood in order to protect speech that matters." (Does the author mean falsehood*s*? And can't false speech "matter"?) Or: "I believe that problems are susceptible to rational solution if we work hard at making and understanding arguments that are based on reason and experience." Lackluster stuff. And the justice (or his ghost) meant "susceptible of."

I wish in short that Mr. Shapiro were a more *fastidious* quoter. One more example: in a clunky, dated passage by ex-President Bok of Harvard University (a former law professor and law-school dean, besides), complaining that the United States has too many lawyers, we read: "Japan boasts a total of less than 15,000 lawyers, while American universities graduate 35,000 *every year.*" What kind of English is "boasts a total of less than"? Anyway the

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word should be *fewer,* not *less,* and the italicization of "every year" is overkill. Moreover, in Japan most of the work that lawyers do in our country is done by persons who are not classified as lawyers, making Bok's comparison meaningless.

So there are lapses of literary taste (and more) in Shapiro's dictionary, and there are curious exclusions too. For example, there is not a single quotation from Paul Freund, the most eloquent of constitutional scholars, or from Frank Easterbrook, possibly the most accomplished rhetorician among living judges, while Ronald Dworkin, the most skillful rhetorician among living writers on jurisprudence, has only one entry, the same number as Roy Cohn and Bob Dylan. The book exhibits lapses of taste in a more elementary sense. In the section "Judicial Appointments," Anita Hill is quoted as testifying at Clarence Thomas's confirmation hearing that Thomas "got up from the table at which we were working, went over to his desk to get the Coke, looked at the can and asked, 'Who has put pubic hair in my Coke?'" Shapiro promised in his preface "spice and provocativeness" and has over-delivered. Is the quotation from Anita Hill even a legal quotation?

Shapiro quotes at great length from a stupid opinion by a deservedly forgotten judge named Musmanno in an obscenity case involving the *Tropic of Cancer.* He quotes from it such gems as, "One wonders how the human species could have produced so lecherous, blasphemous, disgusting and amoral a human being as Henry Miller." Shapiro is big on humor and outrage, so Mark Twain, Ambrose Bierce, H. L. Mencken, Will Rogers, and the overrated dialect humorist Finley Peter Dunne furnish among them many more quotations than either Jackson or Cardozo. I yield to no one in my admiration of *The Devil's Dictionary,* but it is no more a part of the legal canon than Harry Truman's denunciation of music critics is a part of the musical canon.

But now I am criticizing Shapiro for not writing the book I would have written, so let me desist and ask how well he achieved *his* aims. He wanted first of all to include "all the most famous" legal quotations. A linguistic or logical purist would not like "all the most famous"; since "most famous" is not a class with a determinate membership, how is one to know whether one has enumerated all its members? But I think Shapiro has hit as close to the target as one could expect. From John Marshall's "We must never forget, that it is *a constitution* we are expounding" and the first Justice Harlan's "Our Constitution is color-blind" to Holmes's "The most stringent protection of free speech would not protect a man in falsely shouting fire in a theatre and causing a panic" (as well as the two sentences that I quoted earlier from him), and from Cardozo's "The criminal is to go free because the constable has blundered" to Potter Stewart's nondefinition of obscenity ("I know it when I see it"), the best-known legal aphorisms will indeed be found in this book. I missed only Justice Jackson's comment on Supreme Court justices, "We are not final because we are infallible, but we are infallible because we are final." I didn't check every Jackson quotation in the book, but it was not among his quotations under "Judges," "Judicial Review," or "Supreme Court."

Shapiro has been less successful in his other aim, that of supplementing famous legal quotations with those that deserve to be famous because of their "wit, eloquence, or insight." Many of the quotations from the humorists are indeed serviceable for after-dinner speechifying, which is fine; but I do not understand how, for example, the Anita Hill quotation passed the wit-eloquence-insight test. But maybe it belongs to the other class of quotations, that of the "most famous" legal quotations—if in fame we include notoriety, and define legal quotation as anything a lawyer or judge may or may not have said. But I also do not find wit, eloquence, or insight in Lenny Bruce's unfamous statement: "The halls of justice. That's the only place you see the justice, is in the halls." Shock value, rather than truth value, must have induced Shapiro to include not only the quotation from Anita Hill but also this from Margaret Sanger: "Woman was and is condemned to a system under which the lawful rapes exceed the unlawful ones a million to one." I am not accusing Shapiro of political correctness, for he includes under "Abortion," amidst much wooden judicial prose, a witty and pointed quotation from Ronald Reagan: "I've noticed that everybody that is for abortion has already been born." I am accusing Shapiro of occasionally succumbing to the temptation to trade quality for sensation. Reading his dictionary, one finds oneself

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oscillating between the inflated rhetoric, by turns minatory and self-congratulatory, that trips so easily from the tongue of the legal insider ("The history of American freedom is, in no small measure, the history of procedure," or "If we are to keep our democracy, there must be one commandment: Thou shalt not ration justice") and the cynicism of a Bierce, a Mencken, or a Brooks Adams ("Law is merely the expression of the will of the strongest for the time being"). Like many of the quotations in the book, these three sound deep, until one asks what exactly the author meant, which in none of the cases is clear.

But a compiler's task is thankless, and it is time to restore perspective by noting that Mr. Shapiro has indeed produced a unique and valuable reference volume—besides providing a multitude of famous quotations, some deservedly so, he has mined rich veins of wit, eloquence, and insight—one that I shall use happily in my own work despite the reservations I have stated. And in his zeal to track his quotations to their exact source, Shapiro has produced a volume that is not only a work of reference but also one of scholarship. He has left for future quoters the task of seeking through their selection of legal quotations to elevate the literary tastes and skills of the nation's wordiest profession. As it may well be a hopeless task, Mr. Shapiro may have chosen the better part of valor.

The Sovereign Nietzsche

NIETZSCHE AND MODERN TIMES: A STUDY OF BACON, DESCARTES, AND NIETZSCHE. *By Laurence Lampert. Yale University Press. $35.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM E. JOHNSTON, JR.

Friedrich Nietzsche, whose time has come, as he knew it would, some one hundred years after his books were published, once wrote a description of the scholarly type (*The Gay Science,* V, 366 [translated by Walter Kaufmann]): "Almost always the books of scholars are somehow oppressive, oppressed; the 'specialist' emerges somewhere—his zeal, his seriousness, his fury, his overestimation of the nook in which he sits and spins, his hunched back; every specialist has his hunched back. Every scholarly book also mirrors a soul that has become crooked; every craft makes crooked." Yet later, after contrasting the scholarly man with the "man of letters who really *is* nothing but 'represents' almost everything," Nietzsche adds, "No, my scholarly friends, I bless you even for your hunched backs." What the scholars have that those "histrionic in *litteris et artibus*" lack is an attachment to "unconditional *probity* in discipline and prior training." Later still, in the same work, Nietzsche adds, "One does not only wish to be understood when one writes; one wishes just as surely *not* to be understood."

These thoughts of Nietzsche come to mind because Laurence Lampert has written an extraordinarily instructive and comprehensive interpretation of Nietzsche's thought in the form of a history of modern philosophy in the Nietzschean manner. That is, he has appropriated Nietzsche's way of writing about his predecessors to write interpretations of the two founders of the modern project, Bacon and Descartes, as the foreground for a commentary on Nietzsche himself. The study is richly ambitious in reference, reading, and purpose. "The argument of my book is that a new history of philosophy can be written on the basis of Nietzsche's thought, one that can make a defensible claim to know the road, the exit out of whole millennia of labyrinth. That history is based on a comprehensive new understanding of the human and of nature." Lampert's ambition is to disclose "Nietzsche's true radicalism." As he says, "Nietzsche is the first philosopher to rethink the Baconian and Cartesian project from the perspective of its relative completion." One needs to add that Nietzsche is the first philosopher to write from the perspective that all knowledge is perspective.

For Lampert, Bacon can be uncovered through a close reading of *New Atlantis* and *An Advertisement Touching an Holy War.* For Descartes, the important texts are *Discourse on Method* and *The Passions of the Soul.* Every text of Nietzsche is drawn on, but the two that are subject to direct interpretation are the *Use and*

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Disadvantage of History for Life and *The Joyous Science,* Book Five, the latter subject to an aphorism-by-aphorism commentary. What Bacon and Descartes have in common with Nietzsche, or what makes them Nietzschean, is their anti-Christian perspective and their departure from the Platonic project. As Nietzsche was wont to say, Christianity is Platonism for the masses. Lampert's own interpretation is explicitly ecological. He finds in Nietzsche a new philosophy of the earth: "Nietzsche's whole philosophy, his mission . . . [is] to give an account of nature that is in some sense true (while kept under the police supervision of mistrust), and to create the music and poetry that make it possible to live in accord with nature. In Nietzsche, truth and art combine into an ecological philosophy posttheistic and posthumanistic. Post-God and post-Man, it would not have beings be other than they are." Lampert, toward the end of his account, summarizes what he means as it pertains to Nietzsche's politics:

> Nietzsche's politics lays claim to the past. It is the local politics of a "good European" who affirms his European home as heir to Christianity and Greece, to hardness and intellect. But that local politics broadens out as this particular past makes possible the recovery of the whole of the human and natural past; a local loyalty expands into loyalty to the earth.
>
> Nietzsche's politics lays claim to the future. It is a global politics that arose in Europe . . . [but] spreads out as a future global politics of loyalty to the earth, ecological or "green" politics that has only begun to formulate its agenda but that finds in Nietzsche's thought a comprehensive means of affirming the earth.

While Lampert says that Nietzsche's politics "is bound to appall," by placing it in this contemporary ecological context, much of the pall is cast off. Like his earlier brilliant commentary, *Nietzsche's Teaching, An Interpretation of "Thus Spoke Zarathustra,"* Lampert finds Nietzsche to be philanthropic and peaceful, both manly and womanly at once. Is this the scholar talking or a picture of the real Nietzsche?

In our time, Nietzsche has become all things to all people. Books now treat of Nietzsche's contribution to feminism either to attack him or to appropriate him—or both. Marxists, especially in academia, have sought to marshal Nietzsche in their cause, to lend that cause an intellectual respectability it would otherwise lack; it doesn't matter that Nietzsche thought of socialism with unrelieved disdain. The search for an understanding of the hard philosophical core to existentialism, in the thought of Martin Heidegger, stumbling as it must upon Heidegger's Nazi loyalties—Heidegger's view that he was the only true Nazi, the others, including Hitler, just epigones gone to seed—must repair to Nietzsche in the hope of uncovering an explanation for the later philosopher's folly. After all, Heidegger himself wrote a huge commentary on Nietzsche, without exhausting the subject. Freudians admire Nietzsche because Freud did—and anti-Freudians will say that Freud should have read Nietzsche more closely—to avoid being so Freudian. Historians of the secularization of our age must attend to the Nietzsche who discovered and applauded the death of God. Theologians naturally wonder why Nietzsche thought their object of study dead, and wonder, further, what this death might mean, thus becoming Nietzschean without noticing it. Christians, the few genuine ones who are left, note that Nietzsche wrote against Christianity, though he admired Jesus. Was Jesus, then, not a Christian? A Nietzschean question.

To know Nietzsche, one must know his books. For Nietzsche *is* his writings. He did nothing else. But he did not write books in the traditional sense. He wrote books religiously, as though he were composing a kind of new, more revelatory scripture than the old, in verses and aphorisms. Yet the verses and aphorisms are carefully arranged into books having beginnings, middles, and ends, with each aphorism relating to all the rest. Since Nietzsche wrote, among other things, a kind of history of philosophy amidst his aphorisms, Lampert seeks to give a kind of academic flesh to Nietzsche's history by presenting Nietzschean accounts of the founding modern philosophers, Bacon and Descartes. But these readings are not just to explain the latter; they are to explain Nietzsche and to show how his "joyous science" is to replace the tradition of "wisdom" as we have it since Plato—detailed reference to whom we also get in this account. Lampert wishes to resurrect a history of philosophy true to the spirit of its founders, their martial spirit, not the pedantic spirit foisted on them by the usual history that points out what they owed to their times, the errors they

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made, and how far we have gone beyond them.

Montaigne is ignored in our current histories of philosophy. So too is Bacon. Is that a worse fate than the indignity visited on the father of modern philosophy today wherever introductory philosophy classes meet? Novices in philosophy who will never again pick up a philosophy book are taught to laugh at Descartes's silly errors and to find themselves more rational than the rational man who helped father the spiritual world they occupy. Montaigne, Bacon, and Descartes were the greatest minds of their time, but we have believed bad accounts of them even though we possessed their writings and could have seen for ourselves what they divulged. A Nietzschean history of philosophy recovers the role played by the great rational men in our past.

A Nietzschean history also shows that Nietzsche himself was one of the great rational men of our past—and our present. Lampert adopts Nietzsche's "probity" which "must now bring into the open what once had to be kept hidden." But does a "greening" of Nietzsche not gloss over how unsettling Nietzsche's thoughts are when read honestly?

I once assigned large chunks of *Beyond Good and Evil* to an introductory philosophy course. One of my better students returned from a weekend of reading Nietzsche, holding the book between her thumb and forefinger. As she passed my desk, she held the book out in front of her, as though it were a live rat, and said, "I've spent the last few days in the gutter with *him*!"

Hers was a refreshingly direct reaction. When read by eyes unblinkered by academic presumption, Nietzsche puts us in the gutter—or at least knocks us down a peg or two on the ladder of our democratic prejudices. He ranks his readers, and all others, and the rankings usually rankle. As Lampert says, Nietzsche teaches "a fact unwelcome to a democratic age: philosophers like Plato, Bacon, and Descartes are so sovereign that they could presume to become educators of humankind—and succeed." They being sovereign, we are less so.

We resent the shove Nietzsche gives us against our democratic ethos—and we resent perhaps more the laughter we hear as he ridicules our resentment. Our resentment at his attacks on equality, democracy, and the herd mentality, or our embarrassment at his comments on women—at Nietzsche's wielding of a teasing whip against the equality of the sexes—this resentment proves his point, that we are weak and unnaturally hate the strength of those stronger than ourselves, or those who seem to have our number and aren't afraid to call it aloud in public. Given this, how are we to understand Nietzsche's message? What are we to make of the "will to power" and the "eternal return of the same"?

We are familiar with the biblical image of peace. It comes from Isaiah 11:6–7: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox." We moderns, despite our irreligion, resonate to such a pleasantly (and ecologically) peaceful image. Nietzsche will have none of it; he rejects this "goal" root and branch. Why? Because it is against nature, and Nietzsche wants to translate man back into nature. For Nietzsche, man's natural realm is not a large, quiet zoo, where the animals, including man, live peacefully together, all behind bars. Real nature is mocked by this image of a "moral" nature. There is no morality in nature. To effect the "growth" of the wolf cozying up to the lamb, you have to do nothing to the lamb. Instead you have to denature the wolf—and the lion and the bear. What would a "nature" look like where the lions, wolves, and bears act like sheep and all munch on straw in one place? Nietzsche contends that the unnatural harmony of this moral image of a denatured nature would depend on the ruination of the great and noble in nature in order to preserve the weak and the lowly. No one in his right mind would want to do this. Nietzsche's point is that we moderns are not in our right minds.

As with the animals, so with man. Modernity would take the great and noble out of the animal man in favor of the weak and the lowly. Nietzsche's "deadly truth," according to Lampert, is that there is no "cardinal difference between man and the animals." What this means is that, as with the animals, there are differences of strength and beauty between men (and women) as great as the differences

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among the animals. The rank order of differences among men, as among the animals in an unmolested nature, is to be preserved. Since it is in man's power to emasculate himself, as it is within his power to defang wolves in favor of lambs, the rank order of differences has to be willed anew. Nature does not any longer come naturally to men and women. Their invented intelligence and its morality get in the way. Because of Christianity, this Platonism for the masses, humans have come to hate themselves, to loathe their nature, to want to be saved from it. The wish to be out of nature is the wish to be out of our minds. But because we are indeed out of our minds, we take Nietzsche's sanity as insanity. In a crucial aphorism from *Beyond Good and Evil* (a book that might be given the Dostoyevskian title of "Beyond God and the Devil"), Nietzsche writes:

To translate man back into nature; to become master over the many vain and overly enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over that eternal basic text of *homo natura*; to see to it that man henceforth stands before man as even today, hardened in the discipline of science, he stands before the *rest* of nature, with intrepid Oedipus eyes and sealed Odysseus ears, deaf to the siren songs of old metaphysical bird catchers who have been piping at him all too long, "you are more, you are high, you are a different origin!"—that may be a strange and insane task, but it is a *task*—who would deny that? Why did we choose this insane task? Or, putting it differently: "why have knowledge at all?"

This new man, hardened by the discipline of science, shall use his knowledge to deafen himself to his clever intelligence, shall, paradoxically, become master of himself only when he knows that he is less, lower, and of the same origin as the rest of nature. And it is surely no accident that Nietzsche almost immediately follows this aphorism with ones dealing with "the fundamental problem of 'man and woman' "—aphorisms that are so distasteful to the modern reader that Nietzsche's good translator, Walter Kaufmann, has to apologize for them and to assert that he "is surely wrong." But is he? Why read him then?

But will to power and eternal return of the same? Do these constitute a doctrine?

What alone can be *our* doctrine? That no one *gives* man his qualities—neither God, nor society, nor his parents and ancestors, nor he himself. . . . No one is responsible for man's being there at all, for his being such-and-such, or for his being in these circumstances or in his environment. The fatality of his essence is not to be disentangled from the fatality of all that has been and will be. Man is not the effect of some special purpose, of a will, and end; nor is he the object of an attempt to attain an "ideal of humanity" or an "ideal of happiness" or an "ideal of morality." It is absurd to wish to devolve one's essence on some end or other. We have invented the concept of "end": in reality there is no end.

One is necessary, one is a piece of fatefulness, one belongs to the whole, one is the whole; there is nothing which could judge, measure, compare, or sentence our being, for that would mean judging, measuring, comparing, or sentencing the whole. But there is nothing besides the whole. That nobody is held responsible any longer, that the mode of being many not be traced back to a *causa prima*, that the world does not form a unity either as a sensorium or as "spirit"—that alone is the great liberation; with this alone is the innocence of becoming restored. The concept of "God" was until now the greatest objection to existence. We deny God, we deny the responsibility in God: only thereby do we redeem the world. (*Twilight*, "The Four Great Errors," 8)

Nietzsche, to put it gently, was not a democrat. But such understatement hardly does him justice. He rejected the democratic principle that there is no such difference between one human and another as to justify the one ruling the other without that other's consent. Nietzsche believed there were such differences, indeed that life is the affirmation of such differences—regardless of what modern men and women may think. What else could the nature of life be but the endless and goalless affirmation of life itself, the eternal return of the same and the will to power? Nietzsche could find none that was not at base a lie. Thus the strange paradox of nature regarding human nature. Humans were the only animals who *thought* of themselves as other than or more than animals, who thought that nature was *for* them rather than in them or they in it. This was their mistake about themselves, according to Nietzsche. And out of such a mistake a whole marvelous but sickly culture grew. Man had tricked himself into believing he was something other than what he naturally was. The trick can be summarized in a

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kind of shorthand: man has talked himself into believing that the point is to be good rather than to be great—with the consequence that he is neither.

Two great minds of the nineteenth century thought about the meaning and implications of nihilism: Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche. Though contemporaneous, their reactions were very different. They understood nihilism similarly, they agreed on the diagnosis, as it were, but their personal and philosophic solutions were opposite. Dostoyevsky wrote in his notebook for 1880–81: "nihilism appeared among us because we are *all nihilists.* We were merely frightened by the new, original form of its manifestation. . . . Conscience without God is a horror, it may lose its way to the point of utter immorality."

This is the horror Nietzsche was willing to face, indeed to welcome. Losing one's way was to find it. He rejected conscience and morality as so many chains weighing humans down. The death of God would free men and women from their centuries-long legacy of false moral constraints.

The issue of atheism arrested both writers. Of his *Karamazov,* in this same notebook, Dostoyevsky wrote with a self-assertion to rival Nietzsche's. "Not even in Europe is there such a power of atheistic *expressions, nor has there been.* So it is not as a boy, then, that I believe in Christ and confess him, but through the *great crucible of doubt* has my *hosannah* passed." Dostoyevsky chose to confess Christ, his act of will in the face of nihilism, after showing us the Devil of doubt in his Grand Inquisitor; Nietzsche instead created his Zarathustra, a solitary figure of affirmation, and wrote a book called *The Antichrist.* Whose will of these two is the stronger, the more enduring? Or is to ask this question just to play the Platonic game of *who is right?*

The great strength of Laurence Lampert's ecological commentary is that he raises Nietzsche to our attention in a forthright manner and points us in the direction of his greatest predecessors, including Plato, as Nietzsche himself did. The great weakness of it is that to understand Nietzsche in his account you have to desert the commentator's pages for Nietz-

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sche's books. Only thus does the proponent of the proposition that all is interpretation save himself from even the most sympathetic interpretation.

Post-Modernique

SEXY DRESSING ETC. *By Duncan Kennedy. Harvard University Press. $24.95.*

Reviewed by STEPHEN MILLER

At least a decade before the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, many radical American and West European intellectuals found themselves moving away from Marxism. In the past they had criticized the Marxist-Leninist regimes of Eastern Europe for not being "true" Marxist regimes. But in the 1970s many came to the conclusion that the problem was Marxism itself. According to a number of so-called post-modern French thinkers—the most prominent being Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault—Marxism's claim to scientific status was nonsense; Marxism was a hubristic "metanarrative" that did not explain the realities of advanced industrial societies, whether capitalist or communist.

The disenchantment with Marxism and Marxist-Leninist regimes, however, did not lead many post-modern radicals to acknowledge the superiority of democratic capitalist regimes. Unlike, say, Raymond Aron, who argued that there was a dramatic difference between the West and East, post-modern radicals played down the difference between the two. The democratic market-based societies of the West, they often argued, might be superficially more attractive than the Communist societies of the East, but even in the West repression, oppression, and domination were the order of the day. To be sure, oppression took a more subtle form in the West, but it was a difference of degree, not kind. Or as Duncan Kennedy puts it in an essay that appears in *Sexy Dressing Etc.*, "the disciplinary society that underlies modern capitalism may have had its most nearly perfect expression under communism." According to the peculiar logic of post-modern radicalism, communism is the most perfect expression of capitalism.

Duncan Kennedy, who teaches at the Harvard Law School, makes it clear in this collection of essays that he is a post-modern radical in good standing. He is critical of all systems of thought, including Marxism, that claim scientific status and offer an all-encompassing explanation of social and political reality. Such diagnoses, he suggests, are too gloomy because they imply that the forces of repression are totally in control. "Social life in the West today," he says, "is ordered by what we might call in a rough way a capitalist, patriarchal, white supremacist 'regime' but . . . the regime . . . has no 'system logic.'" Since the regime is not capable of "totalitarian control," there is hope for radicals: "small-scale resistance is possible."

What does Professor Kennedy want to resist? His main concerns are racial discrimination and gender domination. The United States, he argues, is a society infected with "mass racial prejudice," a society where "discrimination still operates in myriad ways often invisible to whites, and institutional racism reigns supreme." How to combat this virulent racism? One way is to increase affirmative action programs. In an essay calling for expanding affirmative action programs in the hiring of law school professors, Kennedy says it is a "general democratic principle that people should be represented in institutions that have power over their lives." He doesn't say what he means by "represented," but one assumes he means proportional represention. Moreover, he doesn't clarify what he means by "institutions that have power over their lives." What instititutions is he referring to? And what does he mean by "people"? In recent years many different groups of people have called for "representation"—groups defined by race, sex, ethnic background, age, disabilities, and sexual orientation.

Needless to say, a vast expansion of affirmative action programs for blacks—or any other group—is likely to create a good deal of resentment and increase tensions among different groups in the United States. Professor Kennedy would no doubt argue that if tensions did increase between whites and blacks,

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the finger of blame should be pointed at white America. For he is certain that white racism, which is the only racism he acknowledges, is getting worse and worse: "In each succeeding decade after the Emancipation Proclamation, we [white America] have added new crimes." Kennedy admits that his program will be a destabilizing force, but somehow it will be a force for the good: "An American multicultural society will arise out of guilt, anger, mistrust, cynicism, bitter conflict, and a great deal of confusion and contradiction."

In another essay, Kennedy is more optimistic about the prospects for post-modern radicalism, but the political program he outlines is unlikely to attract many supporters. Kennedy wants to humanize the workplace of the intelligenstia; he urges his fellow radical intellectuals to "make intelligentsia workplace struggles a central part of our lives" in the hope that the radical intelligentsia eventually will form coalitions with the working class and various oppressed minorities. According to Kennedy, the workplace of the intelligentsia—the workplace, that is, of professors—is "authoritarian, hierarchical, and repressive." What this workplace needs, he argues, is a dose of "humanistic, third-force psychology" or "psychological humanism." The terms are vague, but Kennedy implies that the "workplace struggle" would consist of endless meetings in which the participants would be forced to take sides: either committing themselves to becoming truly egalitarian or acknowledging that they are on the side of hierarchy. As Kennedy says, "taking humanism seriously within a formally liberal but actually repressive workplace can split the workforce along a new axis."

Aside from resisting both white racism and a repressive workplace, Kennedy is also engaged in resisting patriarchy. Yet he doesn't completely agree with the radical feminists' view of sexuality. In a rambling ninety-page essay called "Sexual Abuse, Sexy Dressing, and the Eroticization of Domination," he disagrees with the notion that all forms of sexuality—including sexy dressing— promote male domination. He takes seriously the question of "whether it is possible for straight men and women to be sexual, to experience pleasure within the regime, without collaborating in oppression." It is possible to have politically correct sex, Kennedy says, because not everyone who "objectifies" the female is guilty of promoting sexual abuse. Many straight white middle-class men, he says, "feel guilty as charged with respect to sexualization and objectification of the female body, but they don't feel guilty of wanting to abuse women."

In trying to rescue sexuality from the paranoid view of it held by radical feminists, Kennedy sometimes approaches bathos: "So long as I am a straight man, a part of my being is hostage to women: I want them to exist as women, not men, as bearers of the possibility of my own sexual excitement." He favors what he calls "pro-sex feminist postmodernism," wherein anyone can objectify anyone else: women objectify men or objectify other women. For "pleasure within patriarchy . . . can sometimes be resistance, even when the pleasure is based on the very erotic charging of domination and submission that look like main pillars of the regime. This is the challenge of . . . lesbian sadomasochism." In Kennedy's view, lesbian sadomasochism is good—a way of resisting patriarchy—yet "much socially accepted male behavior" is bad because it is "abusive."

It is easy to ridicule an essay that wrings political meanings from sexual acts, but all the essays in this collection should be taken seriously because they are signs of the times—examples of what passes for radicalism in the academy these days. Post-modern radicals seem interested mainly in clinging to their radical self-image, reassuring themselves that they are engaged in a heroic struggle against oppression, despite the collapse of all their fond hopes for radical socioeconomic change. Their radicalism takes the form of advocating multiculturalism and denouncing the political mainstream for being racist, sexist, hierarchical, and oppressive. But the devils they conjure up are generally straw men. Kennedy says that "traditionalist men and women" are so brainwashed by patriarchy that they always blame the victim; the "traditionalists," he claims, say that the rape victim "got what she deserved" for violating the norms of "the regime of liberal patriarchy." He offers no evidence to back up his contention that blaming the victim is a commonplace view.

Is post-modern radicalism an arcane and inconsequential academic game—a mucking about in the latest isms? Kennedy himself implies that he is less than serious about what he

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is doing. As he says in his preface: "I am mainly conscious of trying hard to assimilate, to cannibalize, and then actually *use*, structuralism, neomarxism, phenomenology, existentialism, and postmodernism (and, I suppose, whatever else may come into fashion)." The parenthetical comment, including the "I suppose," is a clever gambit; Kennedy implies that post-modern radicalism, unlike Marxist radicalism, is playful, slippery—even perhaps a bit whimsical. Playful it may be, but post-modern radicalism is a truly radical movement that is now flourishing in the humanities departments of many colleges. Its fate outside the academy remains to be seen, but versions of the post-modernist political agenda are currently being adopted for use outside the classroom, in industry and government, where the workplace is being "humanized" by psychology consultants who conduct anti-racism and anti-sexism seminars that recall the self-criticism sessions that were commonplace in Maoist China. Post-modern radicalism is willfully obscure and jargon-ridden, but it may turn out to be a greater threat to the fabric of American society than Marxist radicalism ever was.

How Good Are We?

THE MORAL SENSE. *By James Q. Wilson. Free Press. $22.95.*

Reviewed by MARY MOTHERSILL

Americans at the moment worry less about losing their jobs or about facing uninsured medical emergencies than they do about being robbed or stabbed or shot. Violent crime, said to be on the rise, is a major focus of national anxiety. With respect to diagnosis and remedy, opinion, lay as well as expert, is divided, but no one, I suppose, would deny that fundamental moral issues are at stake. Professor Wilson's book seems both timely and promising. His background is criminology, his special concern is with the ethical capacities of human beings. No wonder his work has been received with sympathetic interest.

✪ MARY MOTHERSILL is Professor of Philosophy Emeritus at Barnard College, Columbia University, and a Visiting Fellow at M.I.T.

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In his preface, Wilson tells us that his book is "not about laws, institutions, or policies, it is about human nature," and he adds:

> The conclusion is . . . that an older view of human nature than is now current in the human sciences and moral philosophy is the correct view: thinking seriously about the kinds of animals we are will help us understand our persistent but fragile disposition to make moral judgments and the aspects of human relations that must be cultivated if that disposition is to be protected and nurtured.

What is disappointing is that the announcement is not borne out by the work that follows it. We learn virtually nothing about the "older view," and the author's ideas are set forth in a context not of moral philosophy (old or new) but of research that is "current"—that is, the last fifty years or so—in the "human sciences" and in evolutionary biology and history. There are chapters on sympathy, fairness, self-control, duty, the social animal, families, gender, the universal aspiration, and human character. They are loosely linked by the author's speculative interest in moral education and by copious summaries of experimental studies in developmental psychology, anthropology, and sociology. What unity the work can claim is the consequence of a particular ideological stance about which the author is sometimes candid and sometimes not.

His nominal thesis is as follows: there is such a thing as human nature—despite cultural differences, people are pretty much the same everywhere. Its genetic components—the instincts, food, sex, self-preservation—are mainly but not exclusively geared to the survival of the individual. But not all genes are selfish: men are also predisposed to be sociable, generous, and fair-minded—traits that must be assumed to be adaptive for the species. There is, the author claims, an innate "moral sense." Of course, it needs cultivation: if a child is to become a virtuous person, he or she must have a stable family background, strong emotional ties to his or her mother, and parents committed to the task of character building according to moral principles.

Wilson's idea, although hardly novel, is worth discussing. How does he develop it? First he lists types of behavior that cannot be explained by purely selfish motives. Parents expend time, money, and labor and for no better reason than that they care about their kids. People do favors knowing that they will never be returned, and they feel outrage at the mistreatment of those to whom they are totally unrelated. Wilson is much impressed by the disinterested affection bestowed on pets and offers this as a particular instance of genetic determination.

> Pet owners (and people generally) share a more or less common definition of companionship, one that derives from the characteristics of the human infant . . . having a baby-like appearance (big eyes, round features) a cuddly epidermis and displaying playful affection. Several scholars have commented on the tendency not only to acquire as pets animals with these childlike qualities, but also to breed these traits into animals and to make considerable sacrifices on their behalf. There is very little in a theory of inclusive fitness that explains such devotion, yet the mystery disappears if what evolution has selected for is a disposition to attachment.

(This may come as a surprise to devoted owners of turtles or pit bulls or to persons who hate infants but love cats.)

When it comes to specific topics, what Wilson offers as evidence is gleaned from experimental work in the social sciences. This is the most interesting part of the book, and readers who remember something about their survey courses in psychology will be reminded of such famous studies as Milgram's on obedience to authority or Harlow's research on bonding and imprinting (rhesus monkeys, deprived of their mothers, snuggle up to terry-cloth-covered wire frames). Readers will also learn that neonates imitate gestures; that two-year-olds respond in helpful ways to signs of distress; that women, in contrast to men, give priority to caring relationships over abstract justice; that student radicals have strong ties to their parents; that day-care centers can be hazardous; that the unisex living arrangements in kibbutzim go against the grain; that individuals are more likely than groups to help somebody who appears to be in trouble; and so on. Wilson presents summaries and then offers his own interpretations of the experimental results. What he omits as perhaps being too specialized for his audience is the peer criticism of his material. Objections to the methods, procedures, and ethical import of many of his famous experiments have become part of the

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literature, but it is a part that he ignores.

My impression is that Wilson is one of those who believe that the social sciences have taken over the tasks traditionally assigned to philosophy. There is a conception of the history of ideas according to which philosophy, once "the queen of the sciences" was systematically displaced, first by astronomy and physics, later by biology and evolutionary doctrine, and during the past century by psychology, cultural anthropology, and sociology. Philosophy is then imagined as being a thin and wispy subject devoted largely to nitpicky questions about language. This picture is, in my view, false: there is a sense in which Newton displaced Ptolemy and Lavoisier displaced the work of the early alchemists, but the human sciences, like the arts, offer no parallel. As it would be absurd to say that once you have Shakespeare, you can forget about Sophocles, so it would be absurd to claim that psychoanalytic theory renders Plato's account of the tripartite soul superfluous.

Wilson believes that the social sciences fill a gap, and that is why, although he fulminates against moral philosophy, he appears to be unfamiliar with the work of major contemporary thinkers, with the exception of John Rawls of whose *Theory of Justice* he gives a brief and sadly garbled version. Nonetheless, there is nothing wrong with bringing the results of experiments to bear on abstract issues where these involve questions to which empirical evidence is relevant. It is true that sometimes the results strike one as somewhat banal. For example, in his chapter on sympathy, Wilson writes:

> Likes attract likes. This is probably true for helping behavior directed towards strangers as it is for the choice of marriage partners. When researchers posing as either a native or a foreigner asked help from people in large European cities, those appearing to be compatriots fared much better than those appearing to be foreigners. Athenians and Parisians were more likely to give correct street directions to their fellow countrymen than to a foreigner. . . . Similar experiments suggest that whites will help other whites more frequently than they will help blacks.

It is easy but unfair to make fun of such findings. Researchers count what they can count and measure what they think is measurable. One shouldn't expect to be surprised by the results; often what is most interesting is how they are interpreted. But what *counts* as interpretation? What makes one interpretation better than another? What is it to explain an observed phenomenon? What hypotheses can be taken for granted? Which need evidential support? What is a valid argument and when are such arguments called for? These questions are philosophical questions, and social scientists who do not take them seriously are apt to waste time and effort.

Wilson, it seems to me, does not take them seriously, and that is a major weakness. His general thesis is true enough. Human motives are mixed: history may be, as Voltaire claimed, a "record of crimes against humanity," but that is not the whole story. Saints and heroes are exceptional, but many morally unpretentious people act according to principle, try to do what is just and fair, and show sensitivity to the feelings of others. Yet what would ordinarily be taken as a truism Wilson regards as a striking phenomenon in need of special explanation. The capacity to extend one's concerns from kin to non-kin he speaks of as a "psychological orientation": "My interest in this psychological orientation grew out of my studies of crime. What most needed explanation, it seemed to me, was not why some people are criminals but why most people are not."

According to Wilson, the forces that "most easily drive people to break the law"—desires for "food, sex, wealth and self-preservation"—are "instinctive, not learned," while "self-control, sympathy and a sense of fairness," seem to be "learned but not instinctive."

By way of explanation Wilson posits "the moral sense," but I wonder whether this does really *explain* anything or whether it is just an elevated abbreviation of what is supposed to need explanation—namely, the fact that humans may behave decently without feeling great strain. Here is where the evolutionary bit comes in: a concern for morality must have been selected for its adaptive value. Hence "the moral sense" must itself be instinctive—but that can't be quite right. Infants are not from birth conscientious about truth telling and promise keeping, so we must consider what observable characteristics make them susceptible to training and moral education. Wilson's answer is that infants are "innately sociable" and show a desire for attachment and affiliation: they are hardwired for sympathy. I

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guess that is right, but isn't it true also of other primates and mammals in general? (Pandas, I am told, are exceptional in that, aside from affection for offspring, they prefer to live in isolation.) However that may be, Wilson asks us to appreciate the fact that were it not for selfless maternal affection, the species would not have survived and (as he remarks several times) "I would not have written this book and you would not be reading it."

The experimental findings, adduced in support of the "moral sense" hypothesis, do not, as far as I can see, support it any more than they support its denial, and Wilson admits as much. The sympathetic instinct that prompts disinterested helpful actions where our near and dear are concerned is the very force that accounts for hostility to those remote from us. But from Wilson's point of view, *all the better*—since it shows that sympathy has general explanatory power. It turns out that there is *nothing* in the way of evidence that would disconfirm Wilson's hypothesis . . . and that is a bad sign since it means that no evidence confirms it either. On Wilson's interpretation, the Milgram experiment (that's the one where volunteer subjects are deceived into thinking that they are participating in a learning experiment where they are instructed to deliver what they are told are increasingly severe electrical shocks to learners—who are in fact actors—and that they must administer the shocks despite the anguished protests of their "victims") has results that Wilson describes as "chilling"; but he notes that the subjects' apparent lack of sympathy was really an *expression* of sympathy—a desire to please and get on well with the presumptive authorities. If you help a stranger, that bespeaks "the moral sense"; but if you help only your friends, that *also* bespeaks the "moral sense," although in a more limited way.

Or consider Wilson's interpretation of the experiments addressed to the so-called "Kitty Genovese effect." (Kitty Genovese was stabbed to death in the courtyard of a housing complex in full view of her neighbors, none of whom offered help or even took the trouble to phone the police.) What emerged from the studies was the hypothesis that people in a group are less likely to respond to an emergency than is a single individual. Wilson, looking on the bright side, claims that this shows that we do not do brave acts for the sake of

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reputation—otherwise it would be only when we had an audience that we would be moved to heroic deeds. He also tells us that we should not be unduly alarmed by the amount of space and time devoted by the media to stories about crimes against persons and property, terrorism, atrocities, and torture. The reader, he says, "should ask himself why bloodletting and savagery are news." His answer is that such behavior is unusual; were it not, the headlines would feature stories about persons who had obeyed the law. And yet, in commenting on cases of genuine heroism as exemplified during the Nazi occupation by those who helped the Jews at great personal risk, Wilson describes as "extraordinary" the "willingness to alleviate suffering," as if this was not merely unusual but abnormal. At such moments one feels that he does not really believe in his own doctrine of the innate moral sense.

The reader finds it increasingly difficult to understand what point Wilson wants to make and how he thinks it is substantiated. This is a pity since his general subject is important and has been a serious concern of philosophers beginning with Plato. And the empirical studies, including those that Wilson cites, may indeed be relevant but have to be shown to be so.

James Q. Wilson is an intelligent man and seems to have done a lot of reading: he cites over five hundred references—some of them pretty hefty items. So what has gone wrong? I have two related suggestions: one is that the author's zealous optimism dominates his interest in inquiry, and the other is that he views philosophy—both the old (which he approves) and the new (which he deplores)—with evident contempt. His bias emerges in the preface and the first chapter. Simple folk—so we are told—decent law-abiding citizens, believe that there is a real difference between good and bad, right and wrong, but their faith is undermined by pretentious intellectuals. Wilson wants to help the simple folk by putting down the bullies. The central fact of social life, he tells us, is "that it is orderly": "Everyday life for most people most of the time is not characterized by war, criminality or ruthless exploitation, but by more or less peaceable encounters in homes, on the streets and in public places."

Although crime rates, he admits, continue to rise, this is not peculiar to America but is happening all over the world, and besides we should remember that only a tiny fraction of children, even those from disadvantaged homes, grow up to be career criminals. We have been blinded to such truths by the influence of relativism, materialism, and skepticism that have dominated Western culture since the eighteenth century. Thus virtue has "acquired a bad name," and the author explains, "I wrote this book to help people recover the confidence with which they once spoke about virtue and morality."

In a section titled "Morality versus Philosophy," Wilson tells us that the villains are Marxism, a "relentlessly materialistic doctrine," and "analytical philosophy," of which he offers three examples. There is A. J. Ayer, who claimed that "values" cannot be derived from "facts" and that "moral arguments have no objective validity whatsoever"; there is Jean-Paul Sartre, who claimed that we must choose our values but who failed to offer any guidelines to choice; and then there is our contemporary, Richard Rorty. Wilson tells us that Rorty is "perhaps the most important philosophical writer in the present day"; but he does not say what makes him think so, and he says of Rorty's position only that it rejects the idea of a "core self or an inherently human quality." The other subversive doctrines are Freudian psychoanalysis, which tells us that conscientious feelings derive from unconscious guilt and aggressive impulses, and "behavioral psychology," identified with B. F. Skinner, who holds that morality is a conditioned response "impressed on the child by society." ("We become moral in the same way we learn to drive a car. . . . For all the difference it made, people might as well have been Labrador retrievers.") Wilson writes:

> There would be scarcely anything worth calling a moral sense if people can be talked out of it by modern philosophy, secular humanism, Marxist dialectic or pseudo-Freudian psychoanalysis. But I doubt that most people most of the time are affected by these intellectual fashions. The intellectuals who consume them may be affected. If they think that life is without moral meaning, they may live accordingly, creating an avant-garde in which "meaning" is to be found in self-expressive art, a bohemian counterculture, or anarchistic politics. But the lives of most people are centered around the enduring facts of human existence—coping with a family, establish-

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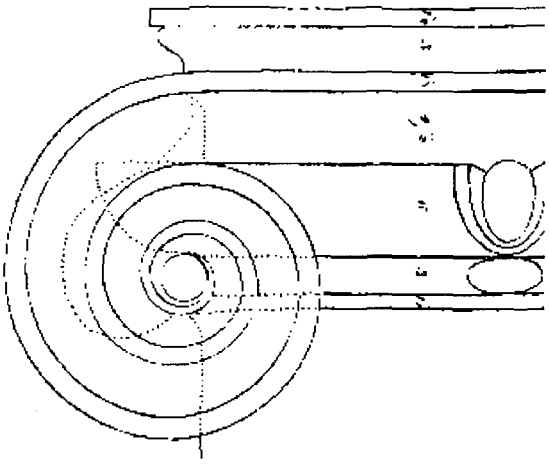

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ing relationships and raising children. Everywhere we look, we find ordinary men and women going about their daily affairs, happily or unhappily, as their circumstances allow, making and acting on moral judgments without pausing to wonder what Marx or Freud or Rorty would say about these judgments.

True, no doubt, not just for us simple folk but for the modern intellectuals as well. The poisonous doctrines on which Wilson centers his attention are today all either discredited or very much out-of-date. Is Marxism really a threat? Psychoanalysis is in decline; Freud is under severe attack; it has been years since Skinnerian behaviorism was taken seriously; and I have never myself met a card-carrying existentialist or an enthusiastic disciple of A. J. Ayer. And as for the avant-garde, young people in all cultures, Wilson says, are wont to "test the limits of acceptable behavior," and it is young people who are responsible for "the high rate of divorce, illegitimacy, drug abuse . . . the rudeness and indecency of so many human encounters with which we have become so familiar." It is up to parents to set the limits.

If the limits are asserted weakly, uncertainly, or apologetically, the effects must surely be weaker than if they are asserted boldly, confidently and persuasively. How vigorously and persuasively we—mostly but not entirely older people—assert those limits will surely depend to some important degree on how confidently we believe in the sentiments that underlie them. Some of us have lost that confidence. The avant-garde in music, art, and literature mocks that confidence.

(Here no examples are offered. It would be interesting to know about the musical mockers.)

A diffuse and sentimental populism is characteristic of conservatism old and new and, except on very elementary levels, is apt to raise questions about the audience being addressed. Wilson, apparently, takes it to be the college educated who need help; they are the ones who are victimized by relativism, materialism, and skepticism. But it is difficult for a preacher to be properly reassuring without appearing to patronize.

Wilson is the James Collins Professor of Management and Public Policy at UCLA and walks a narrow line, as must anyone who embarks on such a project. All popularizers—not just those with an ax to grind—face the problem: finding homely examples that epitomize quantum mechanics or molecular biology is apt to prove an embarrassment. You have to get across your message and the findings of the scientists without relying on graphs or matrices or mathematical statistics. You have to impress your readers with your *own* grasp of technical material and at the same time make it clear that there is no need for them to tax their limited powers by trying to follow in your footsteps. Such conflicting demands encourage a way of writing that alternates between pomposity and disarmingly rueful confession. Remarking on the lack of attention to family influences that extend beyond childhood, Wilson writes, "But for all we scholars know about the continuing saga it might as well not exist."

As for philosophy, Wilson believes that in olden times it served a purpose. Although he doesn't mention Plato, he approves of Aristotle's view of man as a "social animal" who is trained to be virtuous in a family setting. He also approves of Aquinas and the doctrine of natural law. Then, skipping a few hundred years, he says that his own effort to explain the origins of the "moral sense" is a continuation of work begun by certain eighteenth-century English and Scottish thinkers, notably Joseph Butler, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume and Adam Smith."

What is the work that he plans to continue? We never learn. Apart from the passage quoted and bibliographical references, Butler and Hutcheson are never mentioned again. There are fifteen allusions to Adam Smith, all of them perfunctory. Hume gets high marks for having acknowledged the existence of benevolence and the "natural affections," but is chastised for saying that one cannot derive an "ought" statement from an "is" statement and then, "scarcely eight pages after asserting that this cannot be done," saying that parents discharge their duties because they care for their children. But Hume is *not,* even on the surface, deriving an "ought" from an "is": he is giving a causal explanation of conscientious behavior that seems to be what Wilson himself thinks is needed. Wilson notes that to say that morality is based on sentiment is not to say that it is based on "whim or caprice" and that "the teachings of the heart" are "quite compelling." He adds:

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This fact is often obscured by professional philosophers and thus overlooked by their students. As every such student will recall, a course or book on moral philosophy is in large measure an argument intended to show that each school of philosophy (except perhaps the teacher's or the author's) is fatally flawed.

The fatal flaws are morally repugnant outcomes ("Utilitarianism, strictly applied, would justify punishing an innocent man"). Repugnance, according to Wilson, is a sentiment "or, as philosophers would put it, an intuition": "But having relied on our intuitions to demolish a theory, we then discard them as serious philosophical principles. How odd."

But Wilson's scorn is misdirected: moral philosophers do not confuse intuitions with principles; nor do they "discard" either one. Wilson's mistake here can stem only from ignorance of philosophy.

A final point: the operation of a "moral sense" is evinced not only in conduct but also in moral convictions. If Wilson has any convictions, he keeps them under his hat. He has nothing to say about social inequities. That, of course, is his decision, but one wonders about the content of the courses he teaches in "public policy." What is perhaps more surprising is that he has nothing to say about the ethics of research that depends on the deception of human subjects. He refers to "these clever experiments." Is it that he thinks they are all okay? If so, I disagree: life is difficult enough without having to cope with actors who feign collapse in subway cars and simulate bleeding from the mouth with a view to seeing who will or will not come to their assistance. For an author whose announced aim is "to help people recover the confidence with which they once spoke about virtue and morality," Wilson is spectacularly noncommittal. Maybe it is because he believes, like most of his sources, in the alleged distinction between values and facts and thinks that objectivity demands poker-faced reportage. This view, although in my opinion untenable, is nonetheless widely held. But how can we ascribe it to Wilson when he editorializes so freely about the theories he rejects? He tells us that skepticism, relativism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, etc., are no good but says nothing about the arguments or evidence that have seemed to support them. Nor does he offer even a hint about what is wrong with them apart from the

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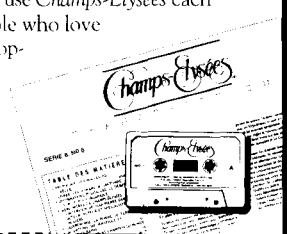

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fact that they are, so he assumes, incompatible with his own views. Thus, despite its air of being, morally speaking, above the fray, his book comes out as the opinionated and dogmatic expression of personal bias. His claim to represent the tradition of David Hume and Adam Smith is empty. His real affinity is with Voltaire's Dr. Pangloss: our world may perhaps not be the *very* best of all possible worlds, but it is not as bad as you think. His concluding paragraph epitomizes a conception of morality that is both limited and, not to put too fine a point on it, sentimental:

> Mankind's moral sense is not a strong beacon light, radiating outward to illuminate in sharp outline all that touches it. It is, rather, a small candle flame, casting vague and multiple shadows, flickering and sputtering in the strong winds of power and passion, greed and ideology. But brought close to the heart and cupped in one's hands, it dispels the darkness and warms the soul.

The Strange Demise

IN EUROPE'S NAME: GERMANY AND THE DIVIDED CONTINENT. *By Timothy Garton Ash. Random House. $27.50.*

Reviewed by JEFFREY GEDMIN

During Konrad Adenauer's tenure as the chancellor of West Germany, which lasted nearly a decade and a half, he steadfastly maintained that if one wished to pursue the cause of freedom for East Germans, such overtures should be addressed to the Soviet Union, not its puppet government in Berlin. While diplomatic fashions changed in Bonn, there is nevertheless much evidence to suggest that as late as the 1980s Moscow had scarcely relaxed its firm control of allies in East Germany. Manfred Uschner, a member of the East German delegation that worked with opposition West German Social Democrats (SPD) to forge common positions on security issues, recalls that "questions from the SPD negotiators were usually passed on directly to Moscow, and one often waited long and impatiently for the answer."

It was Mikhail Gorbachev, of course, who in the end broke Moscow's grip, inadvertently setting German unification in motion. In his new book, Timothy Garton Ash explores the deeper roots to the stunning events of the last decade. Garton Ash, in this remarkable diplomatic history, has produced a masterly, detailed study of German foreign policy and, perhaps more valuable, a volume of carefully thought-out reflections on those Western strategies that may have aided (or delayed) communism's surrender. Bismarck, in Friedrich Naumann's words, "thought Europe from Prussia out." Willy Brandt, according to Garton Ash, "thought Europe from Berlin out." We might fairly add that Garton Ash has written a history of the Cold War "thought from Germany out."

Regrettably, in trading his journalistic pen for the historian's quill, Garton Ash has omitted some of the gritty detail that characterizes much of his work and that seldom fails to charm, amuse, or even amaze. Yet in exchange, he has supplemented his gift for penetrating political analysis with research that draws on a formidable complement of primary and secondary sources (engaging and nuanced as is his text are the 183 pages of notes that follow). In tracing his story, Garton Ash turns to, among others, the personal papers of Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, interviews with Helmut Kohl, Erich Honecker (in prison), and Eduard Shevardnadze (in Moscow), and documents from the East German Communist party archives and the Stasi, East Germany's secret police. The result is a superb book, even if it bears a less-than-perfect title. *In Europe's Name* refers to one of Garton Ash's subplots, albeit an important one: modern Germany's inclination to work through discreet, consensual multilateral instruments in pursuit of the (often legitimate, in Garton Ash's view) German national interest. "I have always found the word 'Europe,' " Garton Ash quotes Bismarck as having said, "in the mouths of those politicians who wanted from other powers something they did not dare to demand in their own name."

The primary subject of Garton Ash's study is *Ostpolitik*—the opening to the East that became a continuous, if qualitatively varied,

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✪ JEFFREY GEDMIN, a research fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, is the author of *The Hidden Hand: Gorbachev and the Collapse of East Germany.*

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thread in the policies practiced by both center-left and center-right governments in Bonn over the two decades preceding Soviet communism's demise. Garton Ash separates out three components in Bonn's approach toward Communist Europe: West Germany's relations with the Soviet Union, its ties to East Germany, and its dealings with the rest of Eastern Europe. Thus *Ostpolitik* was reconciliation with the East; it was Willy Brandt falling to his knees at the memorial to the heroes of the Warsaw ghetto, a stirring symbol of Germany's atonement for a savage and barbaric past; it was a complex of treaties and agreements with the Soviet Union and its allies. That "war should never again go out from German soil" became the mantra of Germany's foreign-policy establishment. Perhaps most important, though, *Ostpolitik* was the West German approach to overcoming Yalta's division of Germany and of Europe. In this respect, it was, above all, pursuit of the German national interest, shrewdly blended into the multilateral and framed by the expression *Wandel durch Annäherung*, "change through rapprochement." Crafted by Brandt and his close adviser Egon Bahr, literally "change through rapprochement" or "relaxation through assurance," as Garton Ash prefers to render it, referred to a means of alleviating, in the short term, the sufferings in Germany caused by division and providing, in the long term, for unification through a policy of "small steps."

For the divided Germans, *Ostpolitik* unquestionably succeeded in making the unbearable less so, as Garton Ash carefully documents. Whether Brandt's, Helmut Schmidt's, or Helmut Kohl's version, *Ostpolitik* delivered in increasing quantities that which the GDR's leadership craved: deutsche marks and recognition. In return, East Berlin dispensed its human alleviations (*menschliche Erleichterungen*). In 1969, Garton Ash notes, there had been a half-million phone calls from West to East Germany; in 1988, there were some forty million. In 1969, there were one million recorded visits from West to East Germany; by the mid-1970s, the figure reached nearly eight million. Remarkably, the number of East Germans under retirement age permitted to travel West on "urgent family matters" reached more than 1.2 million in 1988. Travel policy in the hands of cynical Communist authorities could be a powerful instrument of coercion, of course, applied in a fiercely discriminatory manner. Human alleviations were not human rights. Yet the *menschliche Erleichterungen* were, nevertheless, a vast improvement. They represented, for *Ostpolitik*'s architects, modest ways of keeping the nation together. To the realization of this objective, Garton Ash tips his hat.

Yet *Ostpolitik* as a strategy to end Germany's (and Europe's) division was, as Garton Ash contends, more complex and troubling. Here *Ostpolitik* posited that intensifying cooperation with Communist rulers would induce ideological relaxation. Paradoxically, *Wandel durch Annäherung* meant liberalization through stabilization. "In the long-run, it had more than a touch of Machiavellianism, in the national interest," observes Garton Ash. "German unity could only be achieved if one ceased to demand it!" It was a touch Bismarckian, too, as Brandt and Bahr began to seek distance from Adenauer's unwavering Western orientation. Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, "[Helmut] Schmidt's reaction was cautious to a fault," contends Garton Ash, with the chancellor and his foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher "look[ing] increasingly like jugglers whose balls were beginning to wobble." While the declaration of martial law in Poland in 1981 impinged on Schmidt's summit with Erich Honecker in East Germany, Schmidt "felt obliged," Garton Ash writes, "not only to complete his visit, but also to try to preserve so far as possible . . . what had been achieved in the [East] German-[West] German relationship."

But the quest for stability and "normalcy" of relations with Communist elites led to bizarre and morally dubious *Berührungsängste* (contact fears), a deliberate avoidance of potentially destabilizing contacts. Few from Germany's mainstream parties could boast even a modest network of contacts to dissidents in East Germany when revolution finally toppled the regime. A West German press attaché recalled, in conversation with Garton Ash, Genscher's extreme irritation when he tried to introduce a Solidarity journalist to the foreign minister at a Warsaw press conference in March 1981—this at a time when Solidarity was a fully legal organization in Communist Poland. Garton Ash quotes a Polish dissident who, reminiscing on his days of internment during Solidarity's repression, recalls anguished questions among

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cell mates as they wondered *"at whose expense . . . German Ostpolitik was to be saved."* Garton Ash's own sympathies should not surprise. He was gulping mealy borscht with shipyard workers in Gdansk while West German diplomats (and many Western intellectuals and journalistic colleagues) met in conference with counterparts over fresh fruit and Mosel wines in hard-currency havens.

Of course, Western policy toward the Soviet Empire always entailed the carrot and the stick. Germans often cited NATO's 1967 Harmel report and its "double track" concept of defense and detente. Garton Ash is reluctant to draw simple conclusions about precisely which policies contributed most to communism's sudden implosion. He suggests that the Americans, whether in Jimmy Carter's human-rights crusade or in Ronald Reagan's techno-economic warfare, relied too heavily on sticks, the Germans too much on carrots. Yet he also argues that if *Ostpolitik* was ultimately a success, it succeeded in indirect and largely unintended ways. Ironically, in Garton Ash's judgment, it may have contributed to Gorbachev's illusions about socialism's reformability. It was *Wandel durch Auflehnung* (change through rebellion), Garton Ash reminds us, that finally set East Germans free, not the calibrated reform from above that Brandt and Bahr had sought to encourage in the GDR. Nor is there any evidence to suggest that Honecker's coterie in East Germany had teetered on the verge of liberalization.

Ostpolitik sustained dialogue. It "weaved" closer human ties where none had existed; it produced material benefits, and not just for ruling *nomenklatura*. But how is one to assess, Garton Ash asks, the fact that Siemens computers served the Polish interior ministry and American handcuffs shackled the hands of Vladimir Bukovsky? Karoly Grósz's successor as prime minister of Hungary, Miklós Németh, dismisses the notion that generous loans from Bonn contributed to Hungarian reform. "We spent two thirds of it on interest," Németh tells Garton Ash, "and the remainder importing consumer goods to ease the impression of economic crisis." West Germans have discovered that only a small portion of hard-currency payments to East Berlin actually went to purposes for which they were intended.

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Garton Ash acknowledges, in numerous Soviet-bloc sources. Investigations swirling around the internal causes and external influences behind communism's strange demise will command the attention of scholars and historians for decades to come. Timothy Garton Ash's immense research and sober analysis has set a standard that will help chart the course ahead.

Up from the Cave

THE EVOLUTION MAN, OR HOW I ATE MY FATHER. *By Roy Lewis. Pantheon. $18.*

Reviewed by WILLIAM PETERSEN

Anthropologists by the dozen have instructed us about the Pleistocene, the age of man's emergence. Over several millennia, we are told, hominids gradually gave way to the first humans. In accounts of this transformation, the central theme is often the dimensions, indices, angles, and other characteristics of such skeletal remains as have been recovered. But most of our teachers then go on to culture, the nature of man in his original state.

He is a bloodthirsty savage, or a kindhearted and peace-loving creature. He is totally lacking in religion or, in the works of Father Wilhelm Schmidt, he is endowed with a high morality somewhat reminiscent of Roman Catholic dogma. A cunning child of nature to some, he is a prelogical mystic to Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. When W. H. R. Rivers advocated socialism for England, one of his arguments was that primitive peoples practice a sort of communism. Well before the 1960s, free love was championed with scholarly references to the promiscuity of our earliest forebears.

The typical story of Pleistocene man, in short, comprises in roughly equal parts myth and ideology. Lead-heavy with ponderous Latinisms, the accounts are all too often not only dubious but also dull. Whoever wants to fantasize should let fancy run free, reconstructing an essentially unknowable past with imagination rather than jacked-up erudition.

Roy Lewis is not an anthropologist or paleontologist or prehistorian, but rather a journalist who over many years worked for the London *Times* and the *Economist.* Published originally in 1960, *The Evolution Man* was long out of print. In this reprinting it has become a best-seller in Europe and is available also from an American publisher.

Edward (called "Father" by Ernest, the story's narrator) frenetically pushes his cave family up the evolutionary ladder. His first major success is to borrow fire from a nearby volcano, and with this weapon the clan is able to oust the bears from the best cave in the neighborhood. "At last the girls will get a bit of privacy," Mother comments. And Father responds, "Nature is on the side of the species with the technological edge on the other fellow. But we have a long way to go yet—a long way."

Periodically, especially in wet weather, the clan is visited by Uncle Vanya, a protomember of the Sierra Club. On every possible occasion he repeats his warning that the first, the crucial, mistake was to come down out of the trees. Bringing fire into the cave was a very big stride toward perdition; consider all the babies who burn themselves. "You call it progress," Uncle Vanya remarks, "but I call it disobedience. No animal was ever intended to steal fire from the tops of mountains. I'll have a little of that antelope now, Oswald."

Of Ernest's three brothers, it is settled that, when grown, Oswald would mate with his sister Ann (a strong girl, well able to carry home game), Alexander would mate with Doreen (who is motherly and very fond of him), and Wilbur would mate with Alice. Ernest himself always brings his sister Elsie the eyes of a kill or an uncracked marrowbone or a leaf full of honey or termite-mash. He cannot imagine doing it for anyone else.

But when the boys have reached puberty, Father takes them close to the settlement of another horde and instructs them to go find themselves mates there. "But people always mate with their sisters," Oswald exclaims. "It's the done thing." "Not any more," Father responds. "Exogamy begins right here. We must mix the genes a bit."

So it was that Ernest met Griselda, who could run like an ostrich and swim like a crocodile. After chasing her for eleven days, he was ready to do without a mate. Coming

✪ WILLIAM PETERSEN, retired Professor of Demography from Ohio State University, is the author of *Malthus* and, with Renee Petersen, a five-volume *Dictionary of Demograghy.*

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into a glade he finds her sitting waiting for him, and she confesses that she was merely leading him on and had no intention of ultimately escaping. And now Ernest cannot escape. "You have captured me! You can't go now. We're mates." As in all good stories, Griselda, a designing little minx, is also a good homemaker and wife.

While the boys were off mate-hunting, Mother invented cooking—which Father explains is "a way of preparing game before you eat it, an entirely novel method of reducing ligaments and muscles to a more friable form for mastication." Unlike true carnivores, humans could not bolt their raw meat; and in their pre-cooking childhood they were taught the maxim, "Chew one hundred times before you swallow." However, as Uncle Vanya asked, "Have you considered what cooked food will do to your health? Half of you have dental decay by now, I shouldn't wonder."

Then Father discovers that he need not borrow fire from the mountaintop but can generate it anywhere with a flint. His experiments get out of hand, and the entire countryside is set on fire, destroying the grass and thus eliminating the animals on which the clan feed. They have to migrate and end a good distance off by negotiating with another horde, dividing the new territory with them.

Father, still anxious to advance his fellow beings, experiments and experiments and finally manufactures the first bow and arrow. "Mark I was a clumsy, four-foot affair, bent more at one end than at the middle, with several unscraped lumps in it, and a string that stretched atrociously. Yet it drew!" This advance was too much, however, for the horde. Ernest's brother Oswald was the greatest hunter for miles around, but once this device became common property, he would be no better than any other seeker of game.

Ernest had been taking over as head of the horde, and he decided that there would have to be an accident. And there was: at the test firing, an arrow pierced Father and killed him. Ernest gave a memorial speech, celebrating the greatest ape-man of the Pleistocene. "And that was the end of Father in the flesh, the end that he would have wished for himself—to fall by a really modern weapon and to be eaten in a really civilized way."

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CONTROVERSY

Psychotherapy Awry

I would like to comment on "Psychotherapy Awry" (THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR, Winter 1994), in which Dr. Paul R. McHugh writes about the troubling and tragic case of Paul Lozano and his psychiatrist, Margaret Bean-Bayog. It is important that professionals address, as Dr. McHugh has done, what went awry and how the current theory or practice of psychotherapy might have contributed to what transpired between this particular therapist and her patient.

I agreed with Dr. McHugh's introductory description of the work of psychotherapy and with his initial statements about the dangers of romanticism. I was dismayed as I read on and found many of his generalizations to have little factual basis and to be more romantic than empiric.

As Dr. McHugh states, Dr. Bean-Bayog was hardly a fringe psychotherapist. However, when her practices were discovered, she ceased to be a working psychiatrist at all. Dr. McHugh identifies here with Freudian psychoanalytic thought; there is no evidence for this identification from her credentials or from her practice.

Freudian psychoanalysis and related psychoanalytic psychotherapies are based firmly on reaching conclusions from observation and evidence. Freud himself was the epitome of the empirical scientist. As practiced by Freudian psychoanalysts, work with each case is based on research and discovery. Therapist and patient work painstakingly until they have sufficient evidence for working hypotheses for the causes of reactions and symptoms under study.

Contrary to the impression created by Dr. McHugh, the work of assessment in psychotherapies based on Freudian precepts continues throughout treatment and guides the choice of therapeutic measures. These measures may include use of medication, provision of ego support, and organization of resources, including the resource of patients' families. An unbalanced emphasis on a family's weakness is not a precept of any psychoanalytic school of thought. Psychotherapeutic measures may also include guidance toward recovery of unconscious ideas and feelings. For the more stable patient, attunement to the unconscious can help in understanding and removing barriers to desired change. Any practitioner who bases conclusions and therapeutic actions on a romantic version of theory is not a responsible therapist.

Dr. McHugh's descriptions of good therapy fit with the way psychoanalysts and psychoanalytic therapists think and practice. It is unfortunate that Dr. McHugh makes a leap from Dr. Bean-Bayog, whose practice with Mr. Lozano seems to have been based on her own personal problems, to blaming Freudian psychoanalytic thought for her malpractice. Dr. Bean-Bayog, to the best of my knowledge, represented only her own sad, sick, and dangerous ideas.

"Psychotherapy Awry" raises important questions about avoiding the tragedies that can happen at the hands of a misguided or sick practitioner in the privacy of the consulting room. Incorrect generalizations about the school of thought that provides the bases for all empirical psychotherapy do not provide answers, however. The result of such generalizations could be organized prejudice against psychoanalytically trained practitioners whose expertise is of great value to patients and to the community of psychotherapists on whom falls the task of finding solutions to problems such as those elucidated in "Psychotherapy Awry."

LAURA KLEINERMAN
Faculty, Metropolitan Institute for
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In his "Psychotherapy Awry," Paul R. McHugh sets up a dichotomy in contemporary psychotherapy between what he calls the "romantic" and the "empirical" approaches. I read this article with great interest, as a medical student contemplating entering the field of psychiatry, as a person who has experienced both positives and negatives of "romantic" therapy, and finally as a scientist pursing a doctorate in cell biology, who believes very strongly in empirical approaches to problem solving. However, it is not my experience in any of these three areas that leads to my criticism of Professor McHugh's thesis.

Professor McHugh's criticism of "romantic" therapy is based on the now famous case of Dr. Margaret Bean-Bayog and her patient Paul Lozano, who eventually committed suicide. What troubles me is not that his criticisms are unfounded—they are not. Nor is it that his attack on the psychiatric establishment for defending Dr. Bean-Bayog is misplaced—it is not. The problem with Professor McHugh's approach is that he relies upon a straw-man argument: he has picked a most extreme case of psychiatric malpractice upon which to rest his argument that the "romantic" approach is inherently flawed. One cannot indict a whole approach on the basis of a faulty practitioner of that approach. One could easily set up similar straw men to discredit the "empirical" approach to understanding the human mind, for instance, B. F. Skinner, or the neurosurgeons who ablated brain regions in order to restore mental health. What Professor McHugh fails to recognize is that any approach can be misused or abused, and that any practitioner of a given approach may be practicing incorrectly. Without such recognition, we would be forced to condemn science on the basis of a case of fraud, medicine and law on the basis of a case of malpractice, and capitalism on the basis of an insider-trading scandal.

Undoubtedly, Professor McHugh would make the argument that the excesses of the Paul Lozano case are the unavoidable result of flaws inherent in the "romantic" approach. In his article, though, he fails to demonstrate that these excesses were anything more than the result of poor practice. For instance, the fact that Dr. Bean-Bayog did not attempt to verify her theory of Mr. Lozano's childhood abuse by contacting friends or family represents an instance of professional carelessness, not an institutional flaw in "romantic" therapy. In fact, there are many "romantic" therapists who would endeavor to include family members in the treatment of a case such as Mr. Lozano's. Moreover, the danger posed by "romantic" therapy gone awry is far less than that posed by "empirical" therapy, for "romantic" therapists treat with words, which are only seldom life-threatening. "Empirical" therapists treat with drugs and scalpels, instruments far more dangerous.

One of the most profound and succinct insights into the process of psychotherapy has been made by Dr. Irvin Yalom, who in *Love's Executioner* observed that "it is the relationship that heals." The therapist, whether "romantic" or "empirical," offers not magic, but rather what is ideally a comfortable, healthy, dynamic, insight-oriented arena in which a patient may explore aspects of him- or herself and learn to cope with those issues that provoke crisis. It is the growing and strengthening of the relationship between therapist and patient that provides that arena. However, just as other relationships—marriages, friendships—can be destructive and hurtful, so too the therapeutic relationship can malfunction. Instead of writing off the whole endeavor, let us turn our energy toward training therapists of every approach who are aware of the possibility of dysfunctional therapeutic relationships, and who can act to correct such problems when they arise, even if that means termination of the relationship.

ANTHONY S. FIORINO
Bronx, New York

Paul R. McHugh, whose past writings have been refreshingly corrective of the hysterical approaches that he calls the "romantic" strands of psychotherapy, seems to have fallen into his own hysteria with his paean to "empirical psychiatry."

The Bean-Bayog case and countless permutations of it are being played out by well-trained and poorly trained therapists throughout the country, all feeling quite proud of themselves for being courageous and brilliant enough to root out the horrors of what they believe to be their patients' repressed memories. How formally different is McHugh, who seems so thoroughly convinced that some en-

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tity known as empirical psychiatry is finding the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Both the vigilantes of repressed secrets and the no-nonsense empiricists are guilty of the same fallacy: both are falsely concretizing theoretical speculations, which by necessity are filled with metaphors.

McHugh gives himself away in his closing paragraphs, when he speaks of psychiatrists' "forsaking the false light of metaphor and myth." But does McHugh not know that the disease he so concretely describes in his opening remarks—"depression"—is a near perfect example of useful metaphor? That it has led to useful treatments—both interpersonal and pharmacological—does not make it less of a metaphor.

The problem is neither metaphor nor creativity. The problem is self-righteousness, poor education, ease of entry into the psychiatric professions. I recommend that McHugh join forces with other members of the mental health professions who are calling for higher standards of education, many of whom are both scientific in their thinking and artistic in their clinical work.

ROBERT BARASCH
Montpelier, Vermont

First Jeffrey Masson accuses Freud of selling out to the medical establishment of his day by dropping the "seduction" (read incest) hypothesis. Now, Dr. Paul R. McHugh accuses him of propagating the incest hypothesis. While he is at it, Dr. McHugh attacks the concept of an Oedipus complex and everything that Freud and others who find a dynamic unconscious operating as "romantic" nonsense. It is not quite clear whether he means to include Sophocles as just another romanticist, but it is clear that he is an empiricist. Such simplistic dichotomies should make any reader wary.

All of this is based on what appears to be a case badly bungled by Dr. Margaret Bean-Bayog. But I find, judging only by what Dr. McHugh writes, that Dr. Bean-Bayog's patient stayed alive while she was treating him. After Dr. Bean-Bayog separated from him, "a stormy four months followed . . . [his] suicidal thoughts increased and depression worsened. . . . He was eventually treated *vigorously*—with a combination of antidepressants, lithium, and electroconvulsive therapy" (italics added). Sometime later the patient committed suicide. Quite apart from the fact that electroshock is an extreme form of treatment, it is well known that antidepressants by giving energy to a depressed patient can occasion suicide. Empirically, one might wonder—since the suicide occurred subsequent to this treatment—if the suicide might have been the result of the kind of vigorous, non-Freudian intervention Dr. McHugh advocates.

H. FRANK BRULL
Chicago, Illinois

On Paul R. McHugh's suggestion in "Psychotherapy Awry" that Paul Lozano's medical school deans "understand his changing states of mind," I would note that I have intensively studied the issue of attending post-grade school and taking psychoactive medications and having psychological problems, and I would disagree with him.

I should point out that, not knowing many particulars of Mr. Lozano's case, I am hard-pressed to offer a well-based judgment. But I would consider it generally an invasion of privacy to have medical school deans know about such a state of health. I would think only extraordinary long-term conditions would demand otherwise, and I'm not sure what these would be. If Mr. Lozano was in medical school, he obviously had some measure of the constitution, discipline, and resourcefulness needed to undertake such an arduous task despite his illness. I do not think the benefits of his school deans' knowing about his mental illness would have outweighed the risks of their not acting in accordance with this knowledge in a suitably responsive fashion or even acting in a biased way based on it.

More precisely, the *deans'* concern with him was as a *student*, as with any student, and I think his mental health should only have been an issue to them if *emergent* problems had arisen. And as far as Mr. Lozano was concerned, his mission in school was to prove himself and discipline himself independently of mental illness, and I think this is only facilitated by minimal knowledge on others' parts of this illness.

Dr. McHugh ought to note that attending

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college and professional school—with their sheer challenging nature—is something of a *romantic* quest. It is probably one of the last major romantic quests in this society that has the prestige and payoff it does. It is a privilege to be able to *attend* college or professional school, considering that not everyone who has the brains for them can go, but once you're enrolled and are paying and achieving your way, it is your perfect right to meet the challenge of that schooling with all the privacy that is compatible with a composed performance by the student. This means that knowledge of mental illness by supposedly supportive others should be kept at an absolute minimum that is consistent with assurance of your continued well-being.

Indeed, as Dr. McHugh's remarks on Freudian determinism would imply, a person is never a "mechanical phenomenon" to be considered a mere liability, but a location of potential for both good and bad, to be initiated in large measure by his own will. What better milieu is there in which to honor this than professional school, where honorability and self-determination are so well sanctioned?

GREGORY LUDWIG
Highland Lakes, New Jersey

In Paul R. McHugh's article on psychotherapy, I learn with some surprise that this medical discipline is itself suffering from "raw romanticism." The author does not at any point consider whether it would be less harmful if thoroughly boiled or lightly sautéd; he chooses arbitrarily to keep roasting it: romantics are "infatuated with their own thought"; "they claim to know things they never try to prove"; "they are charmed by novelty and ignore, even disdain, drab facts."

What these accusations show is that Dr. McHugh knows nothing about Romanticism, either as a movement or an attitude. He simply uses a thought-cliché that ignores, even disdains, drab facts. It was the romantics who, after the excess of abstraction that marked the end of the Age of Reason, returned to concreteness and the love of common facts. See Wordsworth's preface to *Lyrical Ballads* and the intellectual history of Europe from 1800 on.

In a professional whose art consists entirely of talk about the self and the world, and who claims for himself the title of empiricist, not to know what our culture owes to romanticism, including the very notion of introspective psychiatry, is bad enough. But equally bad, if not worse, is the use of a supposedly pejorative label to conduct an argument. "*We* are realists; you over there live in a world of illusion." How can the impartial reader fail to discount a presentment that from the outset begs the question?

JACQUES BARZUN
New York, New York

PAUL R. MCHUGH replies: I am grateful to readers for writing and thus providing me an opportunity to expand on my essay and correct any misimpressions. A number of letters strike the same themes. Thus Ms. Kleinerman and Mr. Fiorino suggest I am misleading to base an argument on a single case. Would that this example of "recovered memory therapy" were anomalous and rare. The incident illustrates a vulnerability in psychotherapy—an often unacknowledged but common vulnerability—to accept as truth that which only the imagination supplies.

I am heartened that Ms. Kleinerman sees in my description of suitable psychotherapy exactly what she herself would champion and she agrees that the essay raises vital questions. I believe, however, that her description of Freud as "the epitome of the empirical scientist" is more a devotional than accurate assertion. We agree on so much that it is a shame that we have to disagree at all.

Mr. Fiorino notes that the "relationship" in psychotherapy is crucial. I would have thought that he could recognize that point in the opening paragraphs of my essay. If he believes that I am "writing off the whole endeavor" of psychotherapy, he has neither read the essay with care nor noted the implications of its title. Perhaps he might try again.

Dr. Barasch recommends that I join with those calling for "higher standards of education"—exactly what I thought I was doing. He makes much of his view of metaphor and adduces the diagnostic term *depression* as one. I believe that he is confusing a derivation with a metaphor and thus adding to the clutter of thought in psychiatry.

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Mr. Brull would have it that the death of Paul Lozano after Dr. Bean-Bayog had released him to other physicians (whom she failed to inform about her unusual practices) should be attributed to their treatments. This essay was not an attempt to apportion blame but to display with a mortal example just how misguided a course of romanticized therapy can become and what contortions a like-minded community can assume when a bad outcome based on a false belief has to be defended.

Mr. Ludwig supports patient privacy, but, he might admit, when life is at stake, other rules apply. It is standard psychiatric practice to seek help for the suicidal patient wherever it might be found. Paul Lozano had natural supporters amongst his family and his (physician) deans and supervisors. They could have been trusted to help, and a prudent practitioner would, at least, have given them the opportunity to try.

Finally the learned cultural historian, Jacques Barzun, would deny me the word *romantic* and mocks the adjective *raw* that I used to identify the kind of romanticism to which psychotherapists are vulnerable. Professor Barzun knows *raw* to mean lacking in refinement, i.e., crude, coarse, or vulgar. Thus his reference to Wordsworth's gracious preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* might not seem cogent to our dispute. But it is. In that very essay Wordsworth says his purpose "was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and . . . to throw over them a certain coloring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect." This is precisely what I mean by the romantic disposition—one to emphasize imagination, fantasy, feeling, and the picturesque when faced with facts. It certainly has great merit and has enriched us all, but it must be governed.

Romanticism can and—within "the intellectual history of Europe from 1800"—has led to excesses, some sweet and innocuous like conjuring the elves and brownies of woodland and farm, some vicious and brutal like marching with the Brownshirts for the purity of the *Volk*. These activities must be included amongst "what our culture owes to romanticism." However, they are not all commendable, nor were they all anticipated in Dove Cottage. The thought and practice I condemned in "Psychotherapy Awry" had this dispositional source. I'll stick to *romanticism* as the proper term for this source until someone suggests a better one.

I *am* claiming that some (but specifically not all) psychotherapists "live in a world of illusion." In fact, the record I adduced demonstrated how it is possible for some psychotherapists to forge such a world from macabre metaphors (mostly sexual) about "common facts" such as depressive illness and suicide. Their practice should be repudiated for the simple and medically pragmatic reason that it is difficult for patients to prosper or even for some to survive when treated that way. Such procedures do not represent psychotherapy at its best.

The tragic death of Paul Lozano—a most drab fact—makes the disagreement between Professor Barzun and me about the proper use of the word *romantic* seem trivial, but it is not. The source of energy. supporting the teaching and practice of misguided psychotherapy is crucial to discern. I hold that this energy derives from the emotive appeal of crude romanticism. The long-standing inability of some academic medical faculties to identify it by name and to rebuke it when it corrupts the treatment of the mentally ill and the progress of this discipline is a scandal. On this occasion, Professor Barzun, for all his learning, is, quite uncharacteristically, unhelpful. But then sometimes even good Homer nods.

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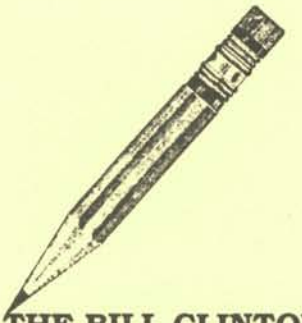

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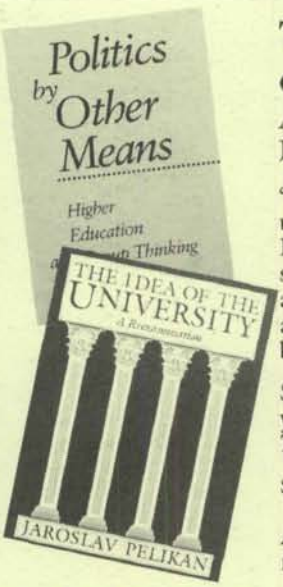

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